



The Third Lebanon War

The Coming Clash Between Hezbollah and Israel in the Shadow of the Iran Nuclear Deal

Jonathan Schanzer, Tony Badran, and David Daoud

Foreword by Yakov Shaharabani



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Table of Contents

Foreword.....	5
Introduction	6
The Syrian Civil War as a Deterrent.....	8
Hezbollah's Domestic Constraints.....	9
The Logic, but Unlikelihood, of an Israeli Preventive Strike.....	11
The Snowball Effect.....	13
The 'Rules of the Game'.....	14
Preparing for a Multi-Front Conflict.....	17
The Role of Russia.....	18
Iran – and its Other Proxies – Could Join the Conflict.....	20
Hezbollah is a More Capable Force.....	21
Israel's Military is Still the Most Capable in the Region.....	26
The War to End All Wars or More of the Same?.....	28
Policy Recommendations.....	29

Foreword

The events of July 12, 2006 shattered all Lebanese and Israeli expectations for another quiet summer. What was first seen as a tactical Hezbollah attack on Israel's border soon led to a war that lasted 34 days. The war was the longest Israel had experienced since its War of Independence in 1948. Neither side had planned for such a lengthy conflict. Neither side wanted such a brutal exchange either. Yet war continued to grind on, causing devastation on both sides of the border.

Since then, the border between Israel and Lebanon has again returned to relative quiet. However, this period of quiet is a deceiving one. The winds of war are blowing. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701, which called for the disarmament of armed groups in Lebanon, was violated by Hezbollah almost the moment it was signed. Gradually and intensively, Hezbollah was able to rebuild itself into a more lethal and dangerous force, far surpassing its previous capabilities. Supported by Iran, and without any significant international constraints, the quantity and the quality of its old and new military capabilities have established Hezbollah as a force one cannot dismiss.

Watching the trend line, another conflict is all but inevitable. It can easily erupt without any warning. It will likely escalate quickly. And in all likelihood, it will be far more destructive and harmful than any other war Israel has fought in recent memory.

Israel may find out very quickly that deterring Hezbollah is not a sufficient strategic goal. Therefore, defeating Hezbollah (or forcing it to leave Lebanon) might become its strategic objective.

Alarming, the next war between Hezbollah and Israel might also draw in other regional players like Syria, or even Iran. In other words, the next Lebanon war could actually devolve into a regional war.

This wide-ranging report written by Foundation for Defense of Democracies scholars Jonathan Schanzer, Tony Badran, and David Daoud provides an extremely thoughtful and thorough examination of possible permutations of the coming conflict. They correctly point out that the “snowball effect” of an unintended conflict may be the most likely scenario. The authors further warn of the ways in which the conflict could include multiple fronts and multiple actors. The impact on the Middle East, already shaken by years of revolution and war, could be devastating.

At its conclusion, the authors offer recommendations. While primarily diplomatic, if implemented properly, they can reduce the chances of an escalation or even guide the conflict to a desired outcome.

With international attention focused squarely on the war against the Islamic State, the disastrous consequences of an escalation between Hezbollah and Israel have been overlooked. Jonathan Schanzer, Tony Badran, and David Daoud lay bare these consequences. As such, this report provides an important service and offers an outstanding opportunity to consider strategies and actions that in times of war would prove far more difficult to achieve.

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Introduction

In August 2015, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) released its first-ever public strategy paper, highlighting the complex challenges to Israel's national security.¹ Notably, it was not Iran's nuclear program nor its ballistic missile development that ranked as the greatest threats to Israel, but rather its regional clients and proxies. Chief among those was the Lebanese terrorist group Hezbollah. One year later that assessment still held,² with IDF Chief of Staff Lt. General Gadi Eizenkot declaring that Hezbollah was the IDF's "main enemy,"³ posing "the most serious threat to Israel."⁴

The last time Hezbollah and Israel went to war was the summer of 2006. Despite the disparity in their capabilities, Israel failed to achieve a decisive military outcome. Instead, that bloody 34-day conflict wrought havoc on both southern Lebanon and northern Israel. Lebanese villages were flattened, citizens of northern Israeli towns fled south, and the war took a financial toll on both sides. In the decade since, Israel and Hezbollah have internalized the lessons of that war. They have rearmed and are preparing for the next clash, which they both see as inevitable.

While there may be no escaping the next war, it is also not necessarily imminent. So long as the Syrian civil war continues to rage and does not end decisively in favor of the Iranian-Syrian-Hezbollah "Resistance Axis," Hezbollah is unlikely to intentionally initiate a large-scale conflict with the IDF. Hezbollah has deployed possibly as many as 6,000 fighters to Syria to battle a wide range of irregular Sunni forces and has sustained many casualties.⁵ Israel has also targeted Hezbollah assets – taking out top commanders and striking shipments of advanced weapons bound for Lebanon.⁶ In short, Hezbollah is spread thin, under fire, and tied down in Syria, likely until the war's end – and possibly beyond that.⁷ For these reasons, IDF top brass recently told incoming Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman that war with Hezbollah "is not on the horizon."⁸

Hezbollah's current quagmire arguably makes it an attractive target for a preventive Israeli strike.⁹ But it is no easy matter for a democratically elected government to intentionally end a 10-year period of calm and prosperity to start a war that almost certainly would

1. Bureau of the Chief of Staff, "אסטרטגיית צה"ל (Strategy of the IDF)," *Israel Defense Forces*, August 2015. (<http://go.ynet.co.il/pic/news/16919.pdf>)

2. INSS Israel, "Remarks by Lt. Gen. Gadi Eizenkot," *YouTube*, January 20, 2016. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BFC9pdAaSiM>)

3. Tal Shalev, "Deal with Iran holds many dangers but also opportunities: Israel Chief of Staff," *i24 News* (Israel), January 18, 2016. (<http://www.inss.org.il/uploadImages/systemFiles/i24%20-%20Deal%20with%20Iran%20holds%20many%20dangers%20but%20also%20opportunities--%20Israel%20Chief%20of%20Staff.pdf>)

4. Cynthia Blank, "IDF Chief: Hezbollah is Israel's 'most serious threat,'" *Arutz Sheva* (Israel), January 18, 2016. (<http://www.inss.org.il/uploadImages/systemFiles/Hezbollah%20is.pdf>)

5. Avi Issacharoff, "A third of Hezbollah's fighters said killed or injured in Syria," *The Times of Israel*, December 15, 2015.

(<http://www.timesofisrael.com/a-third-of-hezbollahs-fighters-said-killed-or-injured-in-syria/>); Bachir El-Khoury, "Le

Hezbollah enlisé dans le borbier syrien (Hezbollah stuck in the Syrian quagmire)," *Le Journal du Dimanche* (France), May 15, 2015. (<http://www.lejdd.fr/International/Moyen-Orient/Le-Hezbollah-enlise-dans-le-borbier-syrien-785617>)

6. David Daoud and Patrick Megahan, "Israeli Strikes in Syria," *Military Edge*, June 7, 2016. (<http://militaryedge.org/analysis-articles/tracker-israeli-strikes-syria/>)

7. "Hezbollah's Shot at Permanency in Syria," *Stratfor*, April 6, 2016. (<https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/hezbollahs-shot-permanency-syria>)

8. Kobi Finkler, "בצה"ל לא רואים מלחמה באופק" (In the IDF, They Don't See a War on the Horizon)," *Arutz7* (Israel), June 2, 2016. (<http://www.inn.co.il/News/News.aspx/323268>)

9. Yahya Dbouq, "لماذا لا تقضي اسرائيل على حزب الله الآن؟" (Why Doesn't Israel Finish Off Hezbollah Now?), *Al Akhbar* (Lebanon), December 16, 2013. (<http://al-akhbar.com/node/197107>)

result in massive property damage, a painful halt to commerce, and significant loss of life. Moreover, the certitude of international backlash and concern over the prospect of discontinued U.S. support in the wake of an unprovoked war makes preemption an unlikely option for the Israelis.

While Hezbollah is not concerned about international law and certainly not constrained by questions of governance, its ability to wage war against Israel is also more limited. After Israel withdrew from southern Lebanon in 2000 to borders approved by the United Nations, it became significantly more difficult for Hezbollah to justify to the Lebanese public, including its Shiite base, that a new war with Israel would warrant the utter devastation that such a conflict would surely entail.

“Not all wars are launched intentionally, and small clashes have a way of spiraling into larger conflagrations.”

Thus for a decade, relative calm has prevailed. However, as the history of the Israel-Hezbollah conflict clearly demonstrates, calm does not always beget calm. Not all wars are launched intentionally, and small clashes have a way of spiraling into larger conflagrations.

Alarming, the potential for conflict is now constant. Hezbollah continues to exploit the chaos of the Syrian civil war to augment its already formidable arsenal with what Israeli military officials call “game changing weapons.” Jerusalem has declared this a red line,¹⁰ and, in response, has repeatedly carried out airstrikes to prevent these arms transfers.¹¹ Hezbollah has absorbed these blows silently, but the group’s leadership has

occasionally felt compelled to respond, even if the response has been only symbolic.¹²

Every skirmish, however small, runs the risk of sparking a larger conflict that neither side intends. Senior Israeli military figures refer to this as the “slippery slope” scenario in which relatively minor tactical strikes can lead to reprisals, which in turn may escalate into a larger conflagration.

This was almost the case in January 2015, when an Israeli aircraft struck a convoy of Iranian and Hezbollah officers in Quneitra province on the Golan Heights, days after Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah spoke in an interview of storming into Israel’s northern Galilee region “and beyond” in any future conflict.¹³ As Military Intelligence Chief Major General Herzi Halevi recently revealed, had Hezbollah’s retaliatory response of firing five Kornet anti-tank missiles at an Israel patrol caused more fatalities (it killed two soldiers), Israel’s “response would have been different ... maybe today on the radio they would be talking about the Third Lebanon War with Hezbollah and not just the second.”¹⁴

12. David Daoud, “Hezbollah responds to Israeli assassination of commander,” *The Long War Journal*, January 6, 2016. (<http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/01/hezbollah-responds-to-israeli-assassination-of-commander.php>); David Daoud and Amir Toumaj, “Iran and Hezbollah Avoid Blaming Israel for Terrorist Commander’s Death,” *The National Interest*, May 25, 2016. (<http://nationalinterest.org/feature/iran-hezbollah-avoid-blaming-israel-terrorist-commanders-16346>)

13. “Nasrallah warns Israel against any ‘stupid’ moves in Lebanon, Syria,” *Al Akhbar* (Lebanon), January 16, 2015. (<http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/23240>); Al-Mayadeen Programs, “حوار خاص 15-01-2015 مع الأمين العام | الحلقة الكاملة | لحزب الله السيد حسن نصر الله (Exclusive Discussion 15-01-2015) Discussion of the Year, with the Secretary General of Hezbollah Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah| The Full Episode,” *YouTube*, January 15, 2015. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCu8p9n_xG4)

14. Judah Ari Gross, “Intelligence chief warns of growing gaps between Israel, neighbors,” *The Times of Israel*, June 15, 2016. (<http://www.timesofisrael.com/intelligence-chief-warns-of-growing-gaps-between-israel-neighbors/>)

10. David Daoud, “Israel Holds Firm to Red Lines in Syria Despite Russian Presence,” *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, December 1, 2015. (<http://www.defenddemocracy.org/media-hit/israel-holds-firm-to-red-lines-in-syria-despite-russian-presence/>)

11. David Daoud and Patrick Megahan, “Israeli Strikes in Syria,” *Military Edge*, June 7, 2016. (<http://militaryedge.org/analysis-articles/tracker-israeli-strikes-syria/>)

Even if Hezbollah starts the next war, the decision to do so may come from Iran. Hezbollah is and always was an instrument of Iranian power – its forward base on the Mediterranean. Iranian officials regularly speak of Hezbollah's rocket arsenal as their own. "In Lebanon alone, over 100,000 missiles are ready to be launched [at Israel]," Brigadier General Hossein Salami, deputy commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, declared in July 2016. "If it serves [our] interests, and if the Zionist regime repeats its past mistakes due to its miscalculations, these missiles ... will strike at the heart of the Zionist regime," Salami said.¹⁵

The Israelis, for their part, may seek to preempt a Hezbollah strike. The perceived need to do so grows as Iran amassed power across the region. However, Israeli officials generally believe that the next conflict will be one that results from an unplanned skirmish that gives way to rapid escalation.

The Third Lebanon War could erupt tomorrow or many years from now. This study endeavors to explain the absence of conflict between these two bitter foes since their last major confrontation in 2006, as well as the factors that could constrain or exacerbate conflict between them in the future. When another war does eventually erupt, even under the best scenarios, the conflict will almost certainly be more devastating to both sides than before, leading to widespread destruction and loss of civilian life. Such a conflict could threaten a wide array of U.S. interests in an already volatile Middle East. It is therefore crucial for American policymakers to understand the complexities, challenges, and devastation that await. Even more crucial are the measures that can be taken to help shape the outcome of the Third Lebanon War.

15. "Iranian commander: 100,000 missiles ready to 'annihilate' Israel," *The Times of Israel*, July 9, 2016. (<http://www.timesofisrael.com/iranian-commander-100000-missiles-ready-to-annihilate-israel/>)

The Syrian Civil War as a Deterrent

Conventional wisdom currently suggests that it would be suicidal for Hezbollah to initiate a conflict that would unleash the full force of the IDF at a time when its fighters are bogged down across the region to prop up Iran's "Resistance Axis." Foremost among those deployments is the existential battle it is fighting in Syria to save the flagging regime of Bashar al-Assad.¹⁶ Bellicose rhetoric notwithstanding,¹⁷ the group is likely incapable of handling a multi-front war against Israel and the Syrian rebels.¹⁸

“Hezbollah’s estimated 4,500-6,000 fighters in Syria are now operating over an increasingly wide area of the country, and the Syrian army has taken on a secondary role.”

Iran's need to deploy Hezbollah in Syria was urgent. The first years of the Syrian civil war severely eroded the Syrian army that stayed loyal to Damascus. Hezbollah's entry into the war was imperative to buttress a hobbled Assad regime. But Hezbollah did not secure the regime's position on its own. Assad's survival was also the result of the Russian military intervention in September 2015, as well as the influx of foot soldiers from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the

16. رعد: عندما نقاتل في سوريا ندافع عن مشروعنا" (Raad: When We Fight in Syria, We are Defending our Project)," *Kataeb.org* (Lebanon), November 8, 2011. (<http://www.kataeb.org/-رعد-عندما-نقاتل-في-سوريا-ندافع-عن-مشروعنا/08/11/2015/مجلات/أخبار/>)

17. Roi Kais, "Nasrallah: We will displace millions of Israelis," *Ynet* (Israel), June 6, 2015. (<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0.7340.L-4665354.00.html>);

18. Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah (السيد حسن نصر الله يهدد بالسيطرة على الجليل Threatens to Take Over the Galilee)," *YouTube*, April 28, 2011. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9-Nx2xxYA0>)

18. Dan De Luce, "Syrian War Takes Rising Toll on Hezbollah," *Foreign Policy*, July 9, 2015. (<http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/07/09/syrian-war-takes-rising-toll-on-hezbollah/>)

regular Iranian army (*Artesh*), and Shiite fighters from Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and elsewhere.

Hezbollah's estimated 4,500-6,000 fighters in Syria are now operating over an increasingly wide area of the country,¹⁹ and the Syrian army has taken on a secondary role.²⁰ Hezbollah has paid a heavy price. Though the group's losses have not been confirmed, hundreds of its elite fighters and commanders have been killed. Indeed, reports indicate that approximately 1,500 Hezbollah fighters deployed to Syria have fallen.²¹ By comparison, Hezbollah's losses from wars with Israel between the years 1985 and 2000 totaled 1,248.²²

For Hezbollah, however, disengaging from Syria is not an option. The Assad regime's survival is the key to the organization's strategic depth and for the organization's

effective control over Lebanon. Syria serves as the land bridge to Iran, which is Hezbollah's military and financial patron. The Syrian regime also provides arms directly to Hezbollah.²³ Thus, ensuring Assad's victory is an existential matter for Hezbollah and a strategic priority for Iran.²⁴

As a result, it is widely believed the organization will try to avoid opening up a second front against the region's most powerful army. The specter of a wider war is even more a deterrent to Hezbollah given the IDF's assessments that the coming conflict could be a decisive one. Indeed, a full-blown confrontation with the IDF now could risk dealing a strategic if not fatal blow to the organization.²⁵

Hezbollah's Domestic Constraints

Hezbollah also has considerable domestic Lebanese factors to take into consideration before it engages in its next war with Israel. Hezbollah's deployment to Syria has put strain on the group's relationship with its Shiite support base in Lebanon. Reports indicate that this community is somewhat conflicted about the fact that their sons are coming home from Syria in body

19. Bachir El-Khoury, "Le Hezbollah enlisé dans le bourbier syrien (Hezbollah stuck in the Syrian quagmire)," *Le Journal du Dimanche* (France), May 15, 2015. (<http://www.lejdd.fr/International/Moyen-Orient/Le-Hezbollah-enlise-dans-le-bourbier-syrien-785617>)

20. "Syria's Assad admits army struggling for manpower," *Al Jazeera* (Qatar), July 26, 2015. (<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/07/syria-assad-speech-150726091936884.html>); Daniel J. Roth, "Are Assad's military forces on the verge of collapse?" *The Jerusalem Post* (Israel), May 1, 2015 (<http://www.jpost.com/International/Bashar-al-Assad-s-military-forces-are-on-the-verge-of-collapse-400800>)

21. Bachir El-Khoury, "Le Hezbollah enlisé dans le bourbier syrien (Hezbollah stuck in the Syrian quagmire)," *Le Journal du Dimanche* (France), May 15, 2015. (<http://www.lejdd.fr/International/Moyen-Orient/Le-Hezbollah-enlise-dans-le-bourbier-syrien-785617>)

22. Avi Issacharoff, "A third of Hezbollah's fighters said killed or injured in Syria," *The Times of Israel*, December 15, 2015. (<http://www.timesofisrael.com/a-third-of-hezbollahs-fighters-said-killed-or-injured-in-syria/>); Susannah George, "This is Not Your Father's Hezbollah," *Foreign Policy*, January 15, 2015. (<http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/01/15/this-is-not-your-fathers-hezbollah/>); Mona Alami, "Meet one of Hezbollah's teen fighters," *Al Monitor*, January 26, 2016. (<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/01/lebanon-hezbollah-teenagers-jihad-syria.html>; <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/joining-hezbollah-insiders-account-15370?page=2>)

23. Yaakov Lappin and Jeremy Binnie, "Israeli general says Syria has resumed weapons production for Hizbullah," *IHS Janes 360*, June 17, 2016. (<http://www.janes.com/article/61491/israeli-general-says-syria-has-resumed-weapons-production-for-hizbullah>)

24. "Everyone has role to play in 'existential' Syria battle: Nasrallah," *The Daily Star* (Lebanon), May 23, 2015. (<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/May-23/299087-everyone-has-role-to-play-in-existential-syria-battle-nasrallah.ashx#.VWCNzFWWpws.twitter>)

25. "IAF chief: Israel will destroy Hezbollah bases in Lebanon, even ones in residential areas," *Reuters*, January 29, 2014. (<http://www.jpost.com/Defense/IAF-chief-Israel-will-destroy-Hezbollah-bases-in-Lebanon-even-those-in-residential-areas-339773>)

bags.²⁶ There are also questions that Hezbollah has had to address as to why the organization is fighting fellow Arabs when its supposed *raison d'être* is to confront Israel. Hezbollah has managed to contain and redirect these sentiments, but it will only be able to continue to do so by maintaining a measure of security and prosperity for the Shiite base. The fear of Sunni jihadist attacks in Shiite neighborhoods,²⁷ coupled with a new round of painful U.S. sanctions imposed on Hezbollah and its supporters,²⁸ have therefore placed additional pressure on Hezbollah as it seeks to placate its political and sectarian base.

“Once lauded as an Arab resistance force battling Israel, the group is today widely seen as a blunt instrument doing the dirty work of Iran.”

Lebanon's Sunni population, meanwhile, is strongly opposed to Hezbollah's support for the Assad regime and its perpetuation of a devastating war next door. The Syrian war has already had a spillover effect in Lebanon, including a massive inflow of refugees and a depressed economy.

Regardless of sect, the Lebanese also remember the 2006 conflict well, and few – even among Hezbollah's

supporters²⁹ – want to face another Israeli onslaught.³⁰ It took Lebanon years to complete reconstruction on the areas destroyed during the 2006 conflict.³¹ The population also understands that a future war with Israel is certain to displace large numbers of Lebanese Shiites, as was the case in 2006. During the last war, these displaced Shiites fled to Syria for safety. But Assad's war, aided by Hezbollah, has made most of Syria's population centers inhospitable to future Lebanese Shiite refugees.

Hezbollah must also struggle with its flagging regional image. Once lauded as an Arab resistance force battling Israel, the group is today widely seen as a blunt instrument doing the dirty work of Iran. Following its involvement in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, to say nothing of its destabilizing activities in the Gulf Arab states, Hezbollah's popularity is at an all-time low. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) now seeks to punish the group for its leading role in Iran's sectarian wars. Saudi Arabia led the GCC in labeling Hezbollah a terror organization, and the Arab League followed suit in March 2016.³² New GCC measures have further prompted Gulf banks to freeze Hezbollah accounts,³³ and authorities have jailed and deported

26. Rola el-Husseini, “Cracks in the Hezbollah monopoly,” *The Washington Post*, January 8, 2015. (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2015/01/08/cracks-in-the-hezbollah-monopoly/>); “Lebanese Shiites’ Divisions Intensify Over Syria,” *Al Monitor*, June 27, 2013. (<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/06/anti-hezbollah-shiite-divisions-attack.html>)

27. Anne Barnard, “ISIS Claims Responsibility for Bombs that Killed Dozens in Beirut,” *The New York Times*, November 12, 2015. (http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/13/world/middleeast/lebanon-explosions-southern-beirut-hezbollah.html?_r=0)

28. Jonathan Schanzer, “Putting Hezbollah ‘out of business,’” *The Washington Times*, May 31, 2016. (<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/may/31/jonathan-schanzer-putting-hezbollah-out-of-business/>)

29. Michael J. Totten, *The Road to Fatima Gate: The Beirut Spring, The Rise of Hezbollah, and the Iranian War Against Israel*, (NY: Encounter Books, 2011), page 161.

30. Michael Totten, “Dreaming of a Lebanon at Peace with its Neighbors,” *The Tower*, July 2013. (<http://www.thetower.org/article/dreaming-of-a-lebanon-completely-at-peace/>)

31. Hezbollah's Waad Foundation completed reconstruction in Beirut's southern suburbs (Dahiyeh) in 2012. “الضاحية تمحو آثار تموز (Dahiyeh erases the traces of July),” *As-Safir* (Lebanon), May 10, 2012. (<http://assafir.com/Article/274887>)

32. Mostafa Salem, “Arab League Labels Hezbollah Terrorist Organization,” *Reuters*, March 11, 2016. (<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-arabs-idUSKCN0WD239>)

33. “Saudi Arabia extends Hezbollah Sanctions,” *The Times of Israel*, February 26, 2016. (<http://www.timesofisrael.com/saudi-arabia-extends-hezbollah-sanctions/>)

Hezbollah-linked figures.³⁴ The broader deportation of Lebanese Shiites have also hurt Hezbollah's base in the pocket book.³⁵

The GCC's hostility toward the group carries implications for a future war between Hezbollah and Israel. It is not hard to imagine Arab silence or even tacit encouragement for Israel's battering of the group. One might also imagine that the Arab states could block international efforts to impose a ceasefire that contained terms favorable to Hezbollah. The implications could extend into post-war reconstruction, too. Whereas the Gulf Arab states gave hundreds of millions of dollars in aid the Lebanese government to reconstruct the areas destroyed by the 2006 war,³⁶ the situation today is markedly different. Saudi Arabia, the most generous donor to Lebanon after the 2006 conflict, announced in February 2016 that it was freezing its grants to Lebanon's military, citing Hezbollah's seizure of the Lebanese state administration.³⁷

34. "UAE jails Emirati woman on charges of spying for Hezbollah," *Gulf Times* (UAE), June 28, 2016. (<http://www.gulf-times.com/story/499690/UAE-jails-Emirati-woman-on-charges-of-spying-for-H>); "Gulf Counter-Hezbollah Campaign Threatens to Deport Lebanese MP," *Asharq al-Aswat* (UK), March 30, 2016. (<http://english.aawsat.com/2016/03/article55349027/gulf-counter-hezbollah-campaign-threatens-deportation-of-lebanese-mp>)

35. Erika Solomon and Simeon Kerr, "Saudi Arabia turns the screw on Lebanon's economy," *Financial Times* (UK), March 8, 2016. (<https://next.ft.com/content/c8252d98-e200-11e5-9217-6ae3733a2cd1>)

36. David Schenker, "Reconstructing Lebanon: Short- and Longer-Term Challenges," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, September 12, 2006. (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/reconstructing-lebanon-short-and-longer-term-challenges>); Lebanon Presidency of the Council of Ministers, "Lebanon: On the Road to Reconstruction and Recovery," December 15, 2006. (<http://www.pcm.gov.lb/Admin/DynamicFile.aspx?PHName=Document&PageID=3916&published=1>)

37. Ben Hubbard, "Saudis Cut off Funding for Military Aid to Lebanon," *The New York Times*, February 19, 2016. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/20/world/middleeast/saudis-cut-off-funding-for-military-aid-to-lebanon.html>)

The Logic, but Unlikelihood, of an Israeli Preventive Strike

The administration's signing of the nuclear deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) has had a deleterious impact on Israel's military calculus and its strategic environment more broadly. President Obama has avoided challenging Iran over its malign behavior across the Middle East for fear that its leaders might scuttle his flagship diplomatic achievement. Prior to the deal, his administration worked assiduously to prevent an Israeli strike on Iran's nuclear facilities.³⁸ He has since called openly for respecting Iran's "equities" in Syria³⁹ – shorthand for allowing Iran to maintain its land bridge with Hezbollah in Lebanon.

There is reason to believe that the president could view an Israeli war with Hezbollah as a threat to the nuclear deal, and thus to the president's legacy. This possibility will linger for the remainder of the Obama administration. It is difficult to predict whether a future U.S. president will continue President Obama's Iran policies or change course.

In the near term, the Israelis are bracing for the immediate impact of several aspects of the deal. Specifically, the JCPOA unfroze roughly \$100 billion in Iranian assets held in foreign banks,⁴⁰ began the process of reintegrating

38. Adam Entous, "Spy vs. Spy: Inside the Fraying U.S.-Israel Ties," *The Wall Street Journal*, October 22, 2015. (<http://www.wsj.com/articles/spy-vs-spy-inside-the-fraying-u-s-israel-ties-1445562074>)

39. The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Press Conference by the President, 12/18/15," December 18, 2015. (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/12/18/press-conference-president-121815>)

40. Rob Garver, "Here's what's in Iran's \$100 billion in assets that will become unfrozen by the nuclear deal," *The Fiscal Times*, July 14, 2015. (<http://www.businessinsider.com/whats-in-irans-100-billion-in-frozen-assets-2015-7>)

Tehran into the international financial system,⁴¹ and opened its economy to international business.⁴² Iran's massive windfall is expected to trickle down to its most important and valuable proxy, Hezbollah, which will in turn help the group evade new, painful sanctions imposed on the group by the U.S. Congress after the deal was signed.⁴³ As Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah recently said, "So long as Iran has money, then we will have money."⁴⁴ These funds will not only help the group pay salaries and maintain its infrastructure; it will almost certainly help Hezbollah pay for more armaments, while also freeing up cash for training, logistical support, and recruitment.

“Iran's mere possession of a nuclear weapon at some point in the future could constrain Israel's military calculus in a future war with Hezbollah.”

But at the same time, the Israelis are aware of the fact that Hezbollah itself is not shielded by the nuclear deal. Thus, as the logic of a preventive strike goes, Israel can either wait for Iran to emerge a nuclear power, free of sanctions, with its regional spheres of influence

41. Juan Zarate, "Terrorism, Missiles and Corruption: The Risks of Economic Engagement with Iran," *Hearing before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs*, May 12, 2016. (<http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA00/20160512/104912/HHRG-114-FA00-Wstate-ZarateJ-20160512.pdf>)

42. Tim Hether and Parisa Hafezi, "Boeing defends Iran jet deal as new details emerge," *Reuters*, June 23, 2016. (<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-boeing-iran-idUSKCN0Z92AU>)

43. Michael Eisenstadt, Simon Henderson, Michael Knights, Matthew Levitt, and Andrew J. Tabler, "The Regional Impact of Additional Iranian Money," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, July 28, 2015. (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-regional-impact-of-additional-iranian-money>)

44. "نصر الله في أربعين بدر الدين أموالنا كصواريخنا تصلنا من إيران" (Nasrallah on the 40th Day After Badreddine's Death, Our Money and Our Missiles Come to Us from Iran)," *YouTube*, June 24, 2016, 00:01:49. (<https://youtu.be/m9ITEu1OObc?t=1m47s>)

recognized, and with a forward missile base on the Mediterranean, or it can move to cut Tehran's principal regional instrument of power projection, namely Hezbollah, which is situated on its borders. In recent years, senior IDF commanders have expressed concerns about an Iranian "nuclear umbrella."⁴⁵ Indeed, Iran's mere possession of a nuclear weapon at some point in the future could constrain Israel's military calculus in a future war with Hezbollah. Put another way, it would seem rational for Israel to strike before the emergence of an adverse strategic environment that would amplify the security threat to Israel.

For Israel, initiating a conflict at a time of its choosing is preferable to simply stumbling into war. It is therefore plausible, even if currently improbable, that Israel could try to goad Hezbollah into initiating a war. The most obvious way to do so would be through a series of strikes against Hezbollah arms convoys or depots inside Lebanon.

Although Hezbollah's current weakened state arguably makes this the ideal time for Israel to launch a preventive war, this is not as easy as it sounds. For one, Israel's northern border has been very quiet for a decade. The Israeli public wants this to continue. And IDF policy has been to preserve this calm for as long as possible. Given the damage that would certainly come with renewed conflict, Israeli political leaders, who are answerable to voters, would be extremely hesitant to launch a war that might result in a fierce public backlash.

Moreover, in the aftermath of an unprovoked strike, Israel would almost certainly be accused of violating international law and the Law of Armed Conflict. This will come despite the fact that both are central

45. " Hamas, Hezbollah would run riot under Iranian nuclear umbrella, general warns," *Israel Hayom* (Israel), January 18, 2012. (http://www.israelhayom.com/site/newsletter_article.php?id=2724)

to the IDF's code of ethics.⁴⁶ Even if Israel's calculus were to be based on the strictest interpretation of international law, a full-scale Israeli attack launched without a credible Hezbollah provocation would likely earn a broad condemnation as a war of aggression at the United Nations Security Council.

Finally, there is the greater fear of invoking the ire of Israel's strongest ally, the United States. This is not to discount decades of warm U.S.-Israel ties or America's strong ongoing military support for Israel. However, diplomatic ties have been strained since the first years of the Obama administration, arising from disagreements over the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Relations were further strained in Obama's second term by the president's rapprochement with Iran, Hezbollah's primary patron, which became the centerpiece of U.S. regional policy.

The Snowball Effect

Israeli and U.S. officials generally view the possibility of an unintended war – such as the 2006 conflict, when a tactical strike gives way to escalation – as the most likely scenario. One recent exchange of hostilities in particular points to the possibility of this “snowball effect.” The Israelis were not looking to provoke an all-out war in January 2015, when they struck the Syrian side of the Golan Heights, killing high-value targets such as Jihad Mughniyeh,⁴⁷ Hezbollah's field commander Mohammad Issa,⁴⁸ and IRGC Brigadier

General Mohammad Ali Allahdadi.⁴⁹ They almost found themselves at war, nevertheless, with heightened Hezbollah and Iranian rhetoric, coupled with a Hezbollah strike on an Israeli military patrol, which was then followed by bellicose Israeli statements.

Close calls notwithstanding, Israel has learned over the last few years that Hezbollah will grudgingly absorb strikes in Syria, including painful blows like the May 2016 killing of top military commander Mustafa Badreddine. On the other hand, the group holds a decidedly different view on strikes in Lebanon. In fact, in 2014, Nasrallah responded to an Israeli strike inside Lebanon by making it clear that his fighters would respond to any attack inside Lebanon, even as a limited shadow war began to take shape in Syria, where the Israelis struck Hezbollah assets on an occasional but regular basis.⁵⁰

“Israel has learned over the last few years that Hezbollah will grudgingly absorb strikes in Syria, including painful blows like the May 2016 killing of top military commander Mustafa Badreddine.”

There have not been any reported Israeli air strikes against Hezbollah in Lebanon since then. The lone exception was the February 2014 strike, when the Israel Air Force (IAF) hit a target near the village of Janta on the Lebanese-Syrian border.⁵¹ Hezbollah

46. Israel Defense Forces, “Doctrine,” accessed July 5, 2016. (<http://www.idf.il/1497-en/Dover.aspx>)

47. Yoav Zitun and Roi Kais, “Jihad Mughniyeh planned attacks against Israel in the Golan Heights,” *Ynet* (Israel), January 18, 2015. (<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4616487,00.html>)

48. “Jihad Moughniyah Son of Hezbollah's Late Commander Killed in Israeli Strike in Syria,” *Ya Libnan* (Lebanon), January 18, 2015. (<http://yalibnan.com/2015/01/18/jihad-moughniyah-son-of-hezbollahs-late-commander-killed-in-israeli-strike-in-syria/>)

49. “Report: Iranian General Killed in Syria Strike Died Because ‘He Kept His Phone On,’” *Haaretz* (Israel), January 24, 2015. (<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/1.638760>)

50. كلمة الأمين العام لحزب الله سماحة السيد حسن نصر الله في اليوم العاشر 2014-11-4 الراية 4-11-2014,” (The Speech of the Secretary General of Hezbollah His Excellency Hassan Nasrallah on the Tenth Day of Muharram in al-Rayah Playing Field 4-11-2014,” *Al Ahed News* (Lebanon), November 4, 2014. (<http://www.alahednews.com.lb/103258/149/-/كلمة-الأمين-العام-لحزب-الله-في-العاشر-من-محرم-في-ملعب-الراية-4-11-2014>)

51. Roi Kais, “Report: Hezbollah militants killed in Israeli strike,” *Ynet* (Israel), February 24, 2014. (<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4492110,00.html>)

struck back against IDF targets in the Shebaa Farms to no avail,⁵² before wounding four Israeli soldiers with an explosive device planted along the border fence near Majdal Shams.⁵³

In his comments following these attacks, Nasrallah sought to establish a deterrence equation against future Israeli strikes in Lebanon and made it clear that he would not sit back and let Israel change the rules of engagement.⁵⁴ Israel has since continued to adhere to these parameters. But it is the flawed understanding of these rules that present the greatest potential for renewed conflict.

The ‘Rules of the Game’

Nasrallah’s declaration in 2014 of Hezbollah’s redlines was not new, of course. Hezbollah’s secretary general has been establishing and revising his organization’s “rules of the game” with Israel for over two decades. The rules have changed quite a bit over the years, as the conflict between these two foes has evolved. During the 1980s, as the war between the two sides began to heat up, there was little structure to guide the conflict. But by the early 1990s, patterns began to emerge. Since then, there have been three clear periods marked by distinct rules of engagement.

The first set of rules began to take shape in 1993, when Israel found the frequency of Hezbollah’s

Katyusha attacks intolerable, prompting Operation Accountability.⁵⁵ Israel’s aerial and artillery bombardment campaign was designed to neutralize the threat posed by Hezbollah. However, Hezbollah was able to maintain constant Katyusha rocket fire against northern Israel throughout the seven days of the operation. The conflict ended with an informal and unwritten agreement brokered by the United States and Syria. The two sides agreed not to target civilians – with Israel refraining from striking Lebanese villages and Hezbollah ceasing to fire rockets into northern Israel – but combatants in the occupied zone were still fair game.

This agreement effectively legitimized Hezbollah attacks on Israeli soldiers and afforded Hezbollah a degree of immunity, as it prevented Israel from targeting the civilian areas where Hezbollah operated. Things came to a head on April 9, 1996, when Israel determined Hezbollah had “crossed the redline” by rocketing northern Israel. The IDF launched Operation Grapes of Wrath in response.⁵⁶

Grapes of Wrath was Israel’s attempt to revise the rules that put them at a strategic disadvantage.⁵⁷ The new rules of the game at the end of that conflict, known as the April Understanding of 1996, echoed the previous unwritten understanding. But this time it was codified in writing and explicitly noted that “civilian populated areas and industrial and electrical installations will not be used as launching grounds for attacks.”⁵⁸

52. Yoav Zitun, “Four IDF soldiers hurt in blast on Israel-Syria border,” *Ynet* (Israel), March 18, 2014. (<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4500477,00.html>)

53. Gili Cohen, Eli Ashkenazi, Jonathan Lis, and Jack Khoury, “Explosion Near Syria Border Wounds Four Israeli Soldiers,” *Haaretz* (Israel), March 18, 2014. (<http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.580498>)

54. نصر الله للإسرائيليين: عملية المزارع شغلنا.. وسياساتنا الاعلامية (Nasrallah to the Israelis: The Shebaa Operation is our Handiwork.. and we Have Modified Our Media Policies), *Assafir* (Lebanon), April 7, 2014. (<http://assafir.com/Article/129/345304>)

55. Nicolas Blanford, *Warriors of God*, (Random House, 2011), page 146.

56. Clive Jones and Sergio Catignani, “Israel and Hizbollah: An asymmetric conflict in historical and comparative perspective,” (London: Routledge, 2010), pages 56-58.

57. Ibid.

58. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Press Release, “Israel-Lebanon Ceasefire Understanding,” April 26, 1996. (<http://mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/israel-lebanon%20ceasefire%20understanding.aspx>)

These rules of engagement, which governed Israel-Hezbollah confrontations for the next ten years, were still highly advantageous for Hezbollah. Indeed, the deputy secretary general of the group, Naim Qassem, famously referred to the Understanding as “tailored to the requirements of the Resistance.”⁵⁹ Notably, Hezbollah saw a big difference between using civilian areas as a “starting point” for operations and using them as “launching grounds.” In other words, Hezbollah could start out from civilian areas to conduct operations, without launching ordnances from them, and then retreat to their safety without Israel having the ability to target them.

A subset of these rules was arguably established in 2000, some five months after Israel withdrew from Lebanon. It began when Hezbollah attacked an IDF patrol with an explosive device and kidnapped three soldiers. Israel responded with artillery fire and airstrikes against Hezbollah and Syrian positions, and a small military force entered Lebanon to chase down the kidnappers. However, with the Second Intifada raging in the Palestinian territories, Prime Minister Ehud Barak was loathe to open up a second front in the north. Barak’s limited response compounded the April Understanding mindset, and set the tone for the next six years of clashes focused around Shebaa Farms, the small territory that Hezbollah claimed that Israel still occupied, despite the UN ratification of its withdrawal.⁶⁰

Thus, from Israel’s withdrawal in 2000 until the end of 2002, Hezbollah initiated attacks on Shebaa Farms every few weeks, leading to limited exchanges. On one occasion, in March 2002, Hezbollah launched two weeks of daily shelling along the Shebaa Farms in response to the IDF’s counterterrorism operations

designed to quell the low-level violence of the Second Intifada in the West Bank.

By 2002, after weathering reprisals from Israel, Hezbollah continued to strike Shebaa Farms, but the frequency dropped. Hezbollah refrained from targeting Israeli citizens if Israel refrained from targeting Lebanese civilians. This resulted in a long period of uninterrupted calm along the Israel-Lebanon border.

Finally, the Second Lebanon War in 2006 helped to shape the current “rules of the game.” That war revealed Iran’s proxy war doctrine against Israel, which was built on supplying Hezbollah with long-range rockets and other advanced systems, effectively turning Lebanon into a forward Iranian missile base.

Even before the 2006 war broke out, the Israelis were reportedly aware that the Syrians, in coordination with Iran, were allowing Hezbollah to store certain weapons systems on Syrian soil.⁶¹ During the course of the war, Syria provided strategic depth for Hezbollah by giving the group access to its own stockpiles of rockets and Russian-made anti-tank systems.⁶² Remarkably, the Israeli Air Force never struck in Syria. The Iranians took note, and following the war’s conclusion, continued to store strategic weapons for Hezbollah on Syrian soil.

The 2006 war revealed changes on the Israeli side, too. The war erupted because Hezbollah carried out an operation that killed three Israeli soldiers, and kidnapped two others (with another five soldiers killed in the subsequent rescue attempt). It soon became clear

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61. Anne Bernard and Eric Schmitt, “Hezbollah Moving Long-Range Missiles From Syria to Lebanon, an Analyst Says,” *The New York Times*, January 2, 2014. (http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/03/world/middleeast/hezbollah-is-said-to-transfer-missiles.html?_r=0)

62. Stephen Erlanger, “A Disciplined Hezbollah Surprises Israel With Its Training, Tactics and Weapons,” *The New York Times*, August 6, 2006. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/07/world/middleeast/07hezbollah.html>)

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59. Naim Qassem, *Hizbullah: The Story from Within*, (Beirut: Saqi Books, 2010), page 211.

60. Avi Issacharoff and Amos Harel, “34 Days: Israel, Hezbollah and the War in Lebanon,” (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pages 39-41.

that Israeli decision makers were no longer constrained by the April Understanding. The IDF hammered Hezbollah infrastructure, even when it was located in civilian areas. In 2008, current IDF Chief of Staff Gadi Eizenkot went one step further and introduced “the Dahiyeh Doctrine.” Eizenkot explained that the destruction of Beirut’s Dahiyeh quarter in 2006 would occur in every civilian area where Hezbollah embedded its military infrastructure. “From our standpoint, these are not civilian villages, they are military bases,” he said.⁶³

“Today’s ‘rules of the game’ have prevailed since Hezbollah’s entry into the Syrian war in 2013.”

Despite the widespread assessment in Israel that the IDF performed poorly during the 2006 war (particularly on the ground against Hezbollah forces), the Dahiyeh Doctrine arguably allowed Israel to restore a measure of deterrence, by exponentially raising the costs of war for Hezbollah. After the war’s conclusion, when faced with the scale of destruction visited on the Shiite areas of Lebanon in particular, Nasrallah famously said in an interview that had he known this would be the response, he would not have gone ahead with the operation to capture the Israeli soldiers. “We did not think, even one percent, that the capture would lead to a war at this time and of this magnitude,” Nasrallah said. “You ask me, if I had known on July 11 ... that the operation would lead to such a war, would I do it? I say no, absolutely not.”⁶⁴

In January 2007, Israeli Minister of Defense Amir Peretz announced another revision in Israel’s military

doctrine, adding defense against rocket threats to its three traditional lines of effort: deterrence, preemption, and offense. The change reflected a recognition of the threat posed by Hezbollah’s long-range missile capabilities, not just to the Israeli civilian population and infrastructure, but also to the IDF’s ability to quickly mobilize its reserves for ground operations. The shift was part of a five-point comprehensive defense doctrine, which includes: deterrence, early warning, passive defense, active defense, and attack. This doctrine evolved over the years and is now predicated on the development of a multi-tiered, integrated ballistic missile defense designed to counter the evolving rocket and missile threats of different sizes and ranges. Of course, countering this threat with missile defense systems, such as Iron Dome (short-range), David’s Sling (medium-range), or Arrow and Patriot missiles (long-range), is prohibitively expensive.

Today’s “rules of the game” have prevailed since Hezbollah’s entry into the Syrian war in 2013. Hezbollah has looked to keep hostilities confined to Syria. Also, it has sought to establish a new status quo, the logic of which is somewhat reminiscent of the April 1996 Understanding, whereby the group could attack Israeli military targets in the Golan region, all while keeping Lebanon immune from severe Israeli retaliation.

As noted above, with Hezbollah moving strategic weapons from Syria to its base in Lebanon, the IDF has seen little alternative to striking Hezbollah targets on the Syrian side of the border. Hezbollah has been forced to absorb these strikes in Syria, so long as those strikes do not visit Lebanon. Indeed, Israel has only struck once inside Lebanon since 2013 (leaving aside the assassination of senior military commander Hassan Laqqis in December of 2013, for which Hezbollah retaliated in the Golan).

63. “Israel warns Hizbullah war would invite destruction,” *Reuters*, October 3, 2008. (<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3604893,00.html>)

64. “2006-08-27 مقابلة السيد نصر الله على الجديد | S. Nasrollah - NEW TV (Sayed Nasrollah I at Al Jadeed TV),” *YouTube*, February 12, 2013. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eSSG8AJ6KUs>)

For Israel, the value of the targets the IDF has destroyed in Syria more than justifies Hezbollah's seemingly half-hearted retaliations. To be sure, Hezbollah has revealed a certain vulnerability. Yet it cannot be ignored that Hezbollah is slowly solidifying its position in the Golan. For Hezbollah, the extension into Syria is a strategic asset.

Preparing for a Multi-Front Conflict

South Lebanon has always served as the “traditional battlefield” between Hezbollah and Israel dating back to 1985. Over time, that conflict has expanded to Hezbollah's stronghold in Lebanon's eastern Beqaa Valley. Hezbollah also has a hold on the southern Beirut suburb of Dahiyeh. Today, Hezbollah is believed to have established military infrastructure across all of Lebanon.⁶⁵ Much of that is embedded in civilian areas, leading one senior Israeli official to declare that “all of Lebanon has become South Lebanon.”⁶⁶

Yet, the next war between Israel and Hezbollah will very likely not be confined to the Lebanese-Israeli border.⁶⁷ Hezbollah will attempt to shift some of the weight of the battle to Syria and the Golan Heights. Indeed, the 2015 Israeli strike against Hezbollah and Iranian assets in Mazraat al-Amal revealed that Hezbollah and Iran plan to connect the Golan Heights to the terror group's south Lebanese stronghold – to make it one contiguous front against Israel. Nasrallah

actually hinted at this objective in a January 30, 2015 speech,⁶⁸ echoing an earlier statement by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.⁶⁹

Israel's assassination of Samir Quntar in December 2015 also provides a glimpse into this strategy. Quntar had reportedly been tasked by Hezbollah to recruit Druze elements in the Golan Heights for operations against Israel.⁷⁰ He was working to establish “Hezbollah Syria,” a Syrian militia under the command and control of Iran, working with the local Druze population. This new force has carried out several IED attacks on the border, often employing Druze recruits from the Golan region.⁷¹ The extent to which these new militias can visit harm upon Israel is still unclear.

Hezbollah has also reportedly been building new military installations in Syria,⁷² which also provide its Iranian patron a base of operations there.⁷³

68. “Nasrallah hints that south Lebanon, Golan Heights one front against Israel, says rules of engagement do not apply anymore,” *The Daily Star* (Lebanon), January 30, 2015.

(<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/Jan-30/285865-nasrallah-hints-that-south-lebanon-golan-heights-one-front-against-israel-says-rules-of-engagement.ashx>)

69. Dominic Evans, “Assad and Nasrallah threaten new front line in Golan,” *Reuters*, May 10, 2013. (<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-golan-idUSBRE9490P620130510>)

70. David Daoud, “Israeli Air Force kills notorious Hezbollah commander in Syria,” *The Long War Journal*, December 22, 2015. (<http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/12/israeli-air-force-kills-notorious-hezbollah-commander-in-syria.php>)

71. “Terrorists killed on Israel-Syria border are natives of Majdal Shams,” *Ynet* (Israel), April 27, 2015. (<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4651235,00.html>)

72. Hezbollah's Shot at Permanency in Syria,” *Stratfor*, April 6, 2016. (<https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/hezbollahs-shot-permanency-syria>)

73. Stuart Winer, “Hezbollah said building missile base in Syria, to strike at Israel,” *The Times of Israel*, April 6, 2016. (<http://www.timesofisrael.com/hezbollah-said-to-fortify-missile-positions-inside-syria/>)

65. Tony Badran, “Born-again ‘resister,’” *Now* (Lebanon), April 07, 2014. (https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/commentary/born-again_resister); Tony Badran, “Hezbollah acts local, thinks global,” *Now* (Lebanon), June 22, 2010. (https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/commentary/hezbollah_acts_local_thinks_global)

66. Senior Israeli official, July 2014.

67. Eric Cortellessa, “General says next Hezbollah war theater will extend to Syria,” *The Times of Israel*, June 29 2015. (<http://www.timesofisrael.com/general-says-next-hezbollah-war-theater-will-extend-to-syria/>)

All of this has serious implications for Israel. Hezbollah's goal appears to be to shift the battle away from its home base of Lebanon, force Israel to fight a more complex multi-front conflict, and force Israel to operate in a more constrained manner. This explains why Israel has been preparing for this multi-front scenario.⁷⁴ It also explains the absence of any hesitation in bombing the Hezbollah/IRGC convoy in Quneitra in January 2015 – to make clear that Hezbollah gaining ground in the Golan will not be tolerated.

“A multi-front war that includes Syria would be an additional challenge from Israel's perspective, and an important asset in the eyes of Hezbollah.”

While engagement continues sporadically, the IDF understands that Hezbollah would like to mire Israel in the complicated Syrian war. Occasional strikes on Hezbollah targets or even quiet assistance to wounded rebel fighters on the northern border is one thing,⁷⁵ it is difficult to predict how the various actors fighting in Syria might behave in a future Israel-Hezbollah war that spills over.⁷⁶ Until now, Israel's ability to stay out of the fray has been a strategic asset, enabling the country to be a spectator or to even help quietly shape the outcome of a war in which its sworn enemies are engaged in mortal combat. A multi-front war that includes Syria would be an additional challenge from Israel's perspective, and an important asset in the eyes of Hezbollah.

74. “IDF holds multi-front war games on northern border,” *The Times of Israel*, January 20, 2016. (<http://www.timesofisrael.com/idf-holds-multi-front-war-games-on-northern-border/>)

75. “Report: Israel treating al-Qaida fighters wounded in Syria civil war,” *The Jerusalem Post* (Israel), March 13, 2015. (<http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Report-Israel-treating-al-Qaida-fighters-wounded-in-Syria-civil-war-393862>)

76. Tony Badran, “Sooner or later, Hezbollah will push Lebanon over the edge,” *Now* (Lebanon), October 10, 2014. (<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/commentaryanalysis/564219-sooner-or-later-hezbollah-will-push-lebanon-over-the-edge>)

The Role of Russia

Russia's entry into the Syrian war on behalf of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad is another factor that Israel must now contend with.⁷⁷ The Russians, in their bid to buttress Assad, have partnered with the Iranians. IRGC Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani traveled to Moscow in July 2015 to meet with top Russian officials to coordinate a military campaign to support the Assad regime. Reports suggest that Soleimani's July trip was preceded by high-level Russian-Iranian contacts, including an exchange between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.⁷⁸

As cooperation has strengthened, Russia has provided air support to the IRGC⁷⁹ and Hezbollah ground missions,⁸⁰ which led to immediate gains for the pro-regime forces.⁸¹ Reports also indicate that advanced

77. Tony Badran, “Why Bibi's Visits to Moscow Mean Bad News for Israel,” *Tablet*, July 5, 2016. (<http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/206472/bibi-in-moscow-bad-news-for-israel>)

78. Laila Bassam and Tom Perry, “How Iranian general plotted out Syrian assault in Moscow,” *Reuters*, October 6, 2015. (<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-soleimani-insigh-idUSKCN0S02BV20151006>); Maria Zakharova, “Reports of Lavrov, Ayatollah Khamenei discussing Syria ‘rubbish’ – Foreign Ministry,” *Sputnik* (Russia), October 7, 2015. (<http://theiranproject.com/blog/2015/10/07/reports-of-lavrov-ayatollah-khamenei-discussing-syria-rubbish-foreign-ministry/>)

79. “Two senior Iranian commanders killed fighting Islamic State jihadists,” *i24 News* (Israel), October 14, 2015. (<http://www.i24news.tv/en/news/international/middle-east/88986-151014-using-russia-s-air-cover-iran-and-hezbollah-send-fighters-to-syria>)

80. Ibrahim al-Amin, “تحالف «1 + 4» لمواجهة الإرهاب (4+1 Alliance to Confront Terrorism),” *Al Akhbar* (Lebanon), September 22, 2015. (<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/242597>)

81. “أسد: متقدمين كעת בכל החזיתות בזכות רוסיה” (Assad: We are Advancing on All Fronts Because of Russia), *nrg* (Israel), November 22, 2015. (<http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART2/738/939.html?hp=1&cat&666=loc=56>)

Russian arms sold to Syria – Yakhont anti-ship missiles,⁸² SA-17 surface-to-air missiles,⁸³ and SA-22 surface-to-air missiles⁸⁴ – may now be in Hezbollah's hands.

Vexed by Russia's entry into the war, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu traveled to Moscow along with IDF Chief of Staff Gadi Eizenkot to meet their Russian counterparts and to spell out Israel's concerns. While expressing resolve to proceed with their operations, the Israelis acknowledged that continued strikes against Hezbollah and even Iranian targets in Syria incurred the risk of accidentally clashing with Russian jets or even killing Russian personnel, potentially sparking an international crisis.

Israel's consultations with Russia have apparently helped to establish an unspecified joint coordination mechanism to avoid inadvertent clashes. By October 2015, Israel resumed its operations in Syria and has since carried out repeated strikes against Hezbollah assets, commanders, and weapons convoys. None of these actions has prompted a public Russian response.⁸⁵

Nevertheless, the Russian intervention did introduce some important restrictions on Israeli activity. For instance, Israel is now concerned that its pilots flying within range of the Russian S-400 anti-aircraft missile

battery stationed in Syria could become targets.⁸⁶ There also appears to be an effective delineation of territory where Israel can still execute missions against Iranian weapons shipments, Hezbollah, and Assad regime targets. This area covers the length of Lebanon's eastern border with Syria, which, including on the Syrian side, is now mostly under Hezbollah control. The Golan area, where Israel regards the "Iranian Axis" establishing military assets as a red line, is also part of this area of continued Israeli operations.

To be sure, thanks to their open communication channels, Russia and Israel have avoided a major incident. After Turkey shot down a Russian plane in November 2015 on the Syrian border, Israel's defense minister revealed that a similar conflict between Moscow and Jerusalem had been prevented, demonstrating that the Russian-Israeli mechanism for deconfliction was working.⁸⁷

Tensions remained, however. In April 2016, ahead of Netanyahu's second trip to Russia, Israeli media reported that one or more Russian jets were scrambled to meet an Israeli squadron flying along the Syrian coast,⁸⁸ in what might possibly have been a Russian

82. Yoav Zitun, "Hezbollah is getting the most sophisticated Russian weapons," *Ynet* (Israel), January 20, 2016. (<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4755776,00.html>)

83. @JulianRoepcke, "Top intelligence source confirms to me, SA-17 Grizzly, #Russia delivered to #Assad last year, now with #Hezbollah," *Twitter*, April 7, 2016. (<https://twitter.com/JulianRoepcke/status/718090171758067712/photo/1>)

84. "Hezbollah has received anti-aircraft missiles from Iran: Netanyahu," *The Daily Star* (Lebanon), October 1, 2015. (<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/Oct-01/317283-iran-has-delivered-sa-22-anti-aircraft-missiles-to-hezbollah-in-lebanon-netanyahu.ashx>)

85. David Daoud, "Israel Holds Firm to Red Lines in Syria Despite Russian Presence," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, December 1, 2015. (<http://www.defenddemocracy.org/media-hit/israel-holds-firm-to-red-lines-in-syria-despite-russian-presence/>)

86. "Top IDF officer: In our nightmares, we never saw Russia's S-400 in Syria," *The Times of Israel*, December 4, 2015. (<http://www.timesofisrael.com/top-idf-officer-in-our-nightmares-we-never-saw-russias-s-400-in-syria/>)

87. Gili Cohen, "Israeli Defense Minister: Russia Also Violated Our Airspace," *Haaretz* (Israel), November 29, 2015. (<http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.688977>)

88. The pro-Hezbollah *As-Safir* newspaper claimed on October 16, 2015 that Russian jets had chased off Israeli jets near Akkar in Northern Lebanon, near Tartous. "أجواء الشمال اللبناني محظورة!" (Northern Lebanon's Airspace is Forbidden to the Israelis), *As-Safir* (Lebanon), October 10, 2015 (<http://assafir.com/Article/450669/Archive>). This claim is similar to Israeli reports in April 2016, although it was never confirmed. These reports raise the question of whether Hezbollah would start arms transfers through this strip of the border in northern Lebanon. One report in Kuwait's *al-Sayassah* claimed this was already the case. "حزب الله يستخدم شمال لبنان لتهرب الأسلحة (Hezbollah is Using Northern Lebanon to Smuggle Weapons)," *Al Seyassah* (Kuwait), April 28, 2016. (<http://al-seyassah.com/حزب-الله-يستخدم-شمال-لبنان-لتهرب-الأسلحة>)

delineation of what is permissible operational space for Israel.⁸⁹ The encounter was a reminder that the “understanding” between Israel and Russia remains rudimentary and vague. Indeed, Netanyahu admitted that his trip to Russia later that month aimed to achieve more clarity between the two sides.⁹⁰ Similarly, his June 2016 visit to Russia – his third in one year⁹¹ – focused on strengthening existing security cooperation and coordination mechanisms.⁹²

While Hezbollah’s initial hopes of obtaining a protective Russian umbrella against Israeli strikes in Syria have not come to fruition, there is still ample reason for Israeli concern. Hezbollah benefits from working side-by-side with Russian officers. Reports indicate that Russia has established two joint operations centers with Iran and Hezbollah – one in Baghdad and the other in Damascus – to coordinate their intelligence activities.⁹³ Whether that coordination would continue during a war between Israel and Hezbollah, or how the presence of Russian military assets in Syria might complicate Israel’s prosecution of a future war, is unclear.

Iran – and its Other Proxies – Could Join the Conflict

Adding to the complexities for Israel is the very real possibility that Iranian forces could join Hezbollah in battle during the next confrontation with Israel. The IRGC, the Iranian army, and Iran-sponsored Shiite militias are already fighting alongside Hezbollah on the battlefields of Syria and Iraq. While they lack training and are no match for Israel’s professional military, these Shiite militias have helped the Assad regime secure its positions, and could be used to bog down the IDF in a ground conflict.

The IRGC was already embedded with Hezbollah during the last conflict. As the war progressed, Israeli military intelligence reported that approximately 100 IRGC combatants and advisors were operating on Hezbollah’s behalf in Lebanese territory. Iran denied this, but the IDF found papers on the bodies of enemy soldiers in south Lebanon clearly identifying them as IRGC. Israeli intelligence soon determined that the IRGC was helping Hezbollah operate complicated weapons systems. This assistance certainly increased Hezbollah capabilities.⁹⁴

Iran can also unleash violence on Israel through its Palestinian proxies.⁹⁵ Palestinian Islamic Jihad’s loyalty to Iran is nearly absolute,⁹⁶ and Tehran has committed to

89. “Russian, Israeli jets said to cross paths over Syria,” *The Times of Israel*, April 22, 2016. (<http://www.timesofisrael.com/report-russian-jet-intercepts-israeli-plane-on-northern-border/>)

90. Ilya Arkhipov and Jonathan Ferziger, “Netanyahu Says He Got Russian Assurances Over Syrian Threat,” *Bloomberg*, April 21, 2016. (<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-04-20/netanyahu-seeks-putin-s-assurance-over-syria-in-moscow-visit>)

91. Raphael Ahren, “Putin backs ‘just’ solution to Israeli-Palestinian conflict,” *The Times of Israel*, June 7, 2016. (<http://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-ties-of-great-importance-says-putin-as-he-meets-netanyahu/>)

92. Dana Samberg, “נתניהו יצא למוסקבה: הסכם פנסיות לעולים יחתם בין רוסיה לישראל (Netanyahu Travels to Moscow: Pension Agreement For Immigrants Will Be Signed Between Israel and Russia),” *Maariv* (Israel), June 6, 2016. (<http://www.maariv.co.il/news/politics/Article-544592>)

93. “Moscow coordinating with Iran, Hezbollah: report,” *Now* (Lebanon), January 10, 2015. (<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/NewsReports/565992-moscow-coordinating-with-iran-hezbollah-report>)

94. Benjamin Lambeth, *Air Operations in Israel’s War Against Hezbollah: Learning from Lebanon and Getting it Right in Gaza*, (Rand Corporation, 2011), pages 14, 131-132, 327. (http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2011/RAND_MG835.pdf)

95. U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism, “Country Reports on Terrorism 2015,” June 2016. (<http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2015/257517.htm>)

96. “רלווד ויילימ 70 ריבעת, ימאלסא דאה’יגב דומתל הבש נאריא: חוויד” (Report: Iran Has Returned to Supporting Islamic Jihad, will Provide 70 Million Dollars Annually), *Walla! News* (Israel), May 25, 2016. (<http://news.walla.co.il/item/2964490>)

providing the group with a fixed budget of \$70 million.⁹⁷ And while little is known about Sabirin, initial reports suggest that its loyalty to Iran is also unshakable.⁹⁸

Iran has experienced tensions with Hamas in recent years because of disagreements over the Syrian civil war,⁹⁹ but the depth of this “break” has likely been exaggerated. Hamas leaders continue to routinely travel to Tehran to reaffirm the strength of their relationship, and Iran played a vital role in arming the Islamist group during the 2014 war.¹⁰⁰ Should Hamas engage in conflict with Israel amidst an ongoing conflict with Hezbollah, the group could force the Israelis to divert Iron Dome and other anti-missile batteries to the southern front with Gaza, leaving the north less protected against Hezbollah’s far more formidable rocket arsenal. For this reason, in July 2015, the IDF conducted a massive surprise drill – the largest in recent years – that simulated rocket attacks from Lebanon as

well as Gaza.¹⁰¹ The threat of attack by Hamas fighters via cross-border tunnels or the sea could also lead the Israelis to divert ground troops to the south.

Meanwhile, Iran may be poised to unleash proxy violence on Israel from the West Bank as well. In August 2014, Iran announced its efforts to arm West Bank Palestinians,¹⁰² with Nasser al-Sudani, the president of the Iranian parliament’s Palestine Committee, saying, “Destroying Israel will only be possible by arming Palestinians ... in the occupied West Bank.”¹⁰³ Echoing this, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei said, “The West Bank should be armed like Gaza...”¹⁰⁴

Hezbollah is a More Capable Force

For Israeli war planners, there is also the very real potential that Hezbollah on its own strength could kill a large numbers of Israelis and cause widespread damage to Israeli infrastructure. The experience Hezbollah has gained during its five years of fighting on behalf of Assad will improve its tactical capabilities and command and control. Moreover, the Syrian war has provided the opportunity for many younger new recruits to become battle-tested.

97. ايران تخصص ميزانية ثابتة لـ“جهاد” الفلسطينية. يعد عودة العلاقات. (Iran Dedicates a Fixed Budget for Palestinian “Jihad”.. After Return of Relations), *Asharq al-Awsat* (UK), May 25, 2016.

(<http://aawsat.com/home/article/648506/-ايران-تخصص-ميزانية-ثابتة-ل-الجهاد-الفلسطينية-يعد-عودة-العلاقات>)

98. Jonathan Schanzer and Grant Rumley, “Iran spawns new jihadist group in Gaza,” *The Long War Journal*, June 18, 2014. (http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/06/by_jonathan_schanzer.php)

99. Ola Atallah, “Khaled Meshaal says Hamas-Iran relations ‘stagnant,’” *Anadolu News Agency* (Turkey), March 15, 2016. (<http://aa.com.tr/en/politics/khaled-meshaal-says-hamas-iran-relations-stagnant-537804>); Elior Levy, “Senior Hamas official: No more military assistance from Iran,” *Ynet* (Israel), July 28, 2015. (<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4684713,00.html>)

100. Carol J. Williams, “Iranian officials say they have armed Hamas for fight with Israel,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 4, 2014. (<http://www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-fg-israel-gaza-hamas-iran-20140804-story.html>); Saeed Kamali Deghan, “Iran supplied Hamas with Fajr-5 missile technology,” *The Guardian* (UK), November 21, 2012. (<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/nov/21/iran-supplied-hamas-missile-technology>); Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Iran provided most of Hamas’ weapons,” August 31, 2014. (<http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Iran/SupportTerror/Pages/Iran-provided-most-of-Hamas-weapons-31-Aug-2014.aspx>)

101. Josef Dolsten, “Surprise IDF drill simulates strikes from north and Gaza,” *The Times of Israel*, July 27, 2015. (<http://www.timesofisrael.com/surprise-idf-drill-simulates-strikes-from-north-and-gaza/>)

102. Marissa Newman, “Iranian supreme leader calls for Israel’s ‘annihilation,’” *The Times of Israel*, November 9, 2014. (<http://www.timesofisrael.com/iranian-supreme-leader-calls-for-israels-annihilation/>)

103. Mahmoud Haniyeh, “مسؤول إيراني: حماس الخط المتقدم في مواجهة إسرائيل (Iranian Official: Hamas is the Frontline in Confronting Israel),” *Al Resalah* (Palestinian Territories), July 20, 2014. (<http://alresalah.ps/ar/index.php?act=post&id=105585>)

104. Ali Khamenei, “The West Bank should be armed like Gaza,” *Speech in Meeting with Students*, July 23, 2014. (<http://english.khamenei.ir/news/3397/The-West-Bank-should-be-armed-like-Gaza>)

Nevertheless, the commander of Israel's elite Egoz Reconnaissance Unit,¹⁰⁵ which is tasked with countering Hezbollah on the ground in south Lebanon,¹⁰⁶ stated that Hezbollah's enhanced capabilities gained in Syria do not worry him.¹⁰⁷ He implied that in Syria, Hezbollah is operating as a regular army against irregular groups that are numerically and qualitatively vastly inferior to the IDF. If it were to operate in the same manner against the IDF in a future war, it would be playing to the IDF's strengths and the power-disparity between the two forces would favor Israel.

In the end, it is Hezbollah's continued training in guerrilla warfare that matters. Whatever success Hezbollah has had in frustrating the most professional army in the Middle East, it has been the result of irregular warfare. Hezbollah wants those frustrations to continue in the next war.

But guerrilla warfare is only part of the equation. Hezbollah's arsenal has grown in both quality and quantity. According to one senior Israel official in 2015, Hezbollah now has "precision weapons," as well as SA-22 anti-aircraft systems and Yakhont anti-ship missiles.¹⁰⁸ Hezbollah could use the latter not only to target Israel's naval vessels, thus limiting the Jewish state's ability to impose a naval blockade on Lebanon, but also to threaten Israel's offshore gas

rigs. The Israeli navy has carried out military exercises simulating such attacks.¹⁰⁹

“The experience Hezbollah has gained during its five years of fighting on behalf of Assad will improve its tactical capabilities and command and control.”

As of late 2015, the group owns “around 10” SCUD-D missiles with conventional warheads, supplied by Syria.¹¹⁰ Hezbollah also has other longer-range projectiles provided by Iran and Syria.¹¹¹ For example, Iran upgraded Hezbollah's rocket capabilities with Zelzal-2 missiles that have a range of closer to 130 miles, making them capable of reaching almost any point in Israel.¹¹²

Another cause for Israeli concern are the Fateh series missiles that Iran and Syria have been supplying Hezbollah. The fourth generation Fateh-110-D1, unveiled in 2012, boasts a range of 190 miles, a more accurate guidance

109. Zuheir Andraous, “تل أبيب أجرت تدريباً يُحاكي هجوماً بحرياً من قبل حزب الله وأحد المفاجآت هو الحصار الذي قد تفرضه المقاومة على الموانئ قبل مطار اللد الدولي نهائياً بصواريخ ‘ياخونت’ (Tel Aviv Carried Out an Exercise Simulating a Naval Assault by Hezbollah, and One of the Surprises is the Blockade the Resistance Could Impose Upon the Ports, Shutting Down Lod International Airport Permanent with Yakhont Missiles),” *Rai al Youm* (UK), May 8, 2016. (<http://www.raialyoum.com/?p=436361>)

110. “Israel says 90 pct of Syria's ballistic missiles used up on rebels,” *Reuters*, November 18, 2015. (<http://www.reuters.com/article/mideast-crisis-syria-missiles-idUSL8N13D4M220151118>); كצין ישראלי בכיר: חיזבאללה מחזיק

(Senior Israeli Officer: Hezbollah Possesses About 10 SCUD-D Missiles),” *Walla! News* (Israel), November 19, 2015. (<http://news.walla.co.il/item/2908005>)

111. “Hizbullah rearming under UN's nose, experts say,” *Ynet* (Israel), October 6, 2007. (<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0.7340.L-3410638.00.html>)

112. Benjamin Lambeth, *Air Operations in Israel's War Against Hezbollah: Learning from Lebanon and Getting it Right in Gaza*, (Rand Corporation, 2011), pages 92-93.

105. Amir Bouhbout, “הקרב שכמעט גבה את חייו של מפקד אגוז (The Battle That Almost Ended the Life of the Commander of the Egoz Unit),” *Walla! News* (Israel), September 25, 2015. (<http://news.walla.co.il/item/2891742>)

106. Yoav Limor and Elon Ben-David, “זוגא: יעיבר מוקם” (Fourth Place: Egoz),” *Ynet* (Israel), January 27, 2008. (<http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0.7340.L-3499090.00.html>)

107. Amir Bohbot, “לש הפרותה תדוקנ תא ההזמ 'זוגא' תדיחי דקפמ” (Commander of “Egoz” Unit Identifies Hezbollah's Weak Point),” *Walla! News* (Israel), September 24, 2015. (<http://news.walla.co.il/item/2892268>)

108. Jonathan Schanzer, “The Nuclear Deal Means War Between Israel and Hezbollah,” *The Huffington Post*, August 21, 2015. (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jonathan-schanzer/the-iran-nuclear-deal-means-war_b_8015144.html)

system,¹¹³ and can carry a 650-kilogram warhead.¹¹⁴ Meanwhile, there is also concern that Hezbollah could soon acquire the Iran-made Fateh-313, which has an even longer range of over 300 miles.¹¹⁵

Among the other advanced weapons now in Hezbollah's possession is the Iranian-made Ababil UAV. This unmanned reconnaissance platform, which can also carry 88-pound high-explosive warheads, has already been used to spy on Israel. Reports suggest that Hezbollah has at least twelve. They provide Hezbollah the ability to monitor IDF movements and conduct reconnaissance missions against its positions. Notably, in 2005, a Hezbollah UAV (presumably an Ababil) was launched into Israel from just north of the border. It observed targets in the Western Galilee for nine minutes before returning safely to Lebanon.¹¹⁶

The sheer volume of the Hezbollah arsenal is also impressive. In November 2009, Israel commandos boarded the *Francop*, a ship off the coast of Israel carrying 500 tons of Iranian arms, including 685 rocket fuses, 170mm and 120mm Katyusha rockets (2,900 in total), 9,000 mortar shells, 3,000 anti-tank rounds for 160mm recoilless rifles, 21,000 F-1 fragmentation

hand grenades, and 566,220 AK-47 rounds.¹¹⁷ The Israeli military estimated that the *Francop's* cargo was the equivalent of only 10 percent of Hezbollah's stocks at the time.¹¹⁸

Today, Israel estimates that Hezbollah possesses roughly 150,000 rockets, in contrast to the 14,000 it had before the 2006 war.¹¹⁹ To be sure, the majority of Hezbollah's projectiles are short-range Katyusha rockets, which individually cause relatively little damage. Yet, fired in large quantities, they can disrupt economic life, cause mass evacuations, and demoralize the Israeli population in the northern part of the country.

“Today, Israel estimates that Hezbollah possesses roughly 150,000 rockets, in contrast to the 14,000 it had before the 2006 war.”

Meanwhile, Nasrallah has warned that the next war will contain “many surprises” and will be far more violent and destructive for Israel.¹²⁰ And he threatened the Israelis that Ben Gurion airport and Haifa port would shut down.¹²¹ It is worth remembering that during the 51-day conflict in 2014, Hamas, whose rockets were far less accurate or destructive than many of the projectiles Hezbollah can deploy, fired roughly 3,500

113. The accuracy of the Fateh A-110 may be around 330 feet CEP. Barbara Starr, “U.S. officials: Syria using more accurate, Iranian-made missiles,” *CNN*, December 28, 2012. (<http://www.cnn.com/2012/12/28/world/meast/syria-missiles/>); “Fateh A-110,” *Missile Threat: A Project of the George C. Marshall and Claremont Institutes*, August 27, 2012. (<http://missilethreat.com/missiles/fateh-a-110/>)

114. Anthony Cordesman, *Iran's Rocket and Missile Forces and Strategic Options*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), page 66; Jeremy Binnie, “Iran unveils extended range Fateh ballistic missile,” *IHS Jane's 360*, August 26, 2015. (<http://www.janes.com/article/53816/iran-unveils-extended-range-fateh-ballistic-missile>)

115. Jeremy Binnie, “Iran unveils extended range Fateh ballistic missile,” *IHS Jane's 360*, August 26, 2015. (<http://www.janes.com/article/53816/iran-unveils-extended-range-fateh-ballistic-missile>)

116. Benjamin Lambeth, *Air Operations in Israel's War Against Hezbollah: Learning from Lebanon and Getting It Right in Gaza*, (Rand Corporation, 2011), pages 131-132.

117. Yaakov Katz, “The haul: 320 tons of Katyushas, other rockets, shells and bullets,” *The Jerusalem Post* (Israel), November 5, 2009. (<http://www.jpost.com/Israel/The-haul-320-tons-of-Katyushas-other-rockets-shells-and-bullets>)

118. Anshel Pfeffer, “Israel Seizes Ship in Mediterranean Carrying More Than 3,000 Rockets,” *Haaretz* (Israel), November 5, 2009. (<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/israel-seizes-ship-in-mediterranean-carrying-more-than-3-000-rockets-1.4742>)

119. Yoav Hendel and Yaakov Katz, *Israel vs. Iran: The Shadow War*, (Potomac Books, 2012), page 47.

120. Haitham Al-Mousaoui, “نصر الله: الحرب المقبلة ستبدأ من تل أبيب (Nasrallah: The Next War Will Begin in Tel Aviv),” *Al Akhbar* (Lebanon). (<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/24171>)

121. Roi Kais, “Nasrallah: You will be forced to close your ports; our missiles will reach every inch of Israel,” *Ynet* (Israel), November 4, 2011. (<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4587978,00.html>)

rockets, which spooked airlines from landing planes in Israel, and grounded tourism to a halt.¹²²

Nasrallah has also threatened to attack Haifa's ammonia facilities,¹²³ and even the nuclear reactor at Dimona.¹²⁴ And while senior IDF officers have discounted some of these threats,¹²⁵ there is real concern that Hezbollah could accurately target other critical infrastructure, like Israel's offshore gas rigs and its airports and seaports.¹²⁶ Hezbollah could also try to hinder troop movement to the front lines by striking at Israel's highway system.

There is further concern that Hezbollah will deliberately target Israel's heartland. In 2006, with more limited capabilities, the group rained daily rockets on Haifa reaching as far south as Hadera with its Syrian-made

M-302 rockets (dubbed Khaibar-1).¹²⁷ Nasrallah also threatened repeatedly that Tel Aviv would come under heavy rocket fire in the next war.¹²⁸ It is worth noting that Tel Aviv is located at the heart of central Israel's Gush Dan region, which – with 45 percent of Israel's population¹²⁹ – is the country's most populous area and its commercial center. Rockets targeting this area could severely disrupt Israeli commerce.

Israel is also expecting Hezbollah to have a wider network of underground tunnels to transport troops, hide rockets, and launch ambushes on Israeli soldiers. These tunnels are, of course, not new. After the IDF withdrew from south Lebanon in 2000, Hezbollah built a vast underground infrastructure – known as “Nature Reserves” (*shmurot teva*) in IDF parlance – throughout south Lebanon and its villages. When Israeli forces entered the country in 2006, these tunnels caught them off-guard.¹³⁰ After the war, UNIFIL discovered no less than 33 of these tunnels scattered across the southern Lebanese countryside. These underground fortifications were impervious to aerial or artillery bombardment, and their placement close to the Israeli border enabled Hezbollah to continue firing rockets at northern Israel throughout the war and ambush Israeli troops in south Lebanon.¹³¹

122. Rick Gladstone, “U.S. Advises Americans to Put Off Travel to Israel,” *The New York Times*, July 21, 2014. (http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/22/world/middleeast/us-advises-americans-to-put-off-travel-to-israel.html?_r=0); European Aviation Safety Agency, Press Release, “Strong recommendation to avoid Tel Aviv Ben Gourion International Airport until further notice,” July 23, 2014 (<https://www.easa.europa.eu/newsroom-and-events/news/strong-recommendation-avoid-tel-aviv-ben-gourion-international-airport>)

123. Hassan Nasrallah, “كلمة سماحة الأمين العام لحزب الله السيد حسن نصرالله في ذكرى القادة الشهداء 2016-2-16 (Speech of His Excellency The Secretary General of Hezbollah Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah on the Anniversary of the Martyr Commanders 16-02-2016),” *YouTube*, February 16, 2016. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9skPMz8Dupo>)

124. “Hezbollah head warns Israel against war, threatens nuke sites,” *Times of Israel* (Israel), March 21, 2016. (<http://www.timesofisrael.com/nasrallah-warns-israel-against-war-threatens-to-hit-nuclear-sites/>)

125. Yuval Azulai, “Senior IDF officer: Haifa ammonia tank no atom bomb,” *Globes* (Israel), March 15, 2016. (<http://www.globes.co.il/en/article-senior-idf-officer-haifa-ammonia-tank-no-atom-bomb-1001110162>)

126. “Hezbollah Rockets Can Reach All of Israel, Nasrallah Warns,” *Haaretz* (Israel), November 4, 2014. (<http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.624544>); Roe Nahmias, “Nasrallah threatens to attack Ben-Gurion Airport,” *Ynet* (Israel), February 16, 2010. (<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3850185,00.html>)

127. Moran Zelikovich, “Police: Missile fired at Hadera,” *Ynet* (Israel), August 9, 2006. (<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3288617,00.html>)

128. Haitham Al-Mousaoui, “نصر الله: الحرب المقبلة ستبدأ من تل أبيب (Nasrallah: The Next War Will Begin in Tel Aviv),” *Al Akhbar* (Lebanon). (<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/24171>)

129. Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality, “תכונות האוכלוסייה (Population Characteristics),” 2014. (<https://www.tel-aviv.gov.il/Transparency/DocLib/410202%תכונות%02%לוחות.pdf>)

130. Uzi Mahnaimi, “Humbling of the Suptertroops Shatters Israeli Army Morale,” *The Times* (UK), August 27, 2006. (<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/article620874.ece>)

131. Amos Harel, “Hezbollah Hides Rockets From UN in S. Lebanon Villages,” *Haaretz* (Israel), July 22, 2007. (<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/hezbollah-hides-rockets-from-un-in-s-lebanon-villages-1.226010>)

Hezbollah today boasts of its expanded tunnel network.¹³² Residents of northern Israeli towns have complained of hearing tunnel digging noises, prompting the IDF to comb the north for possible attack tunnels to no avail.¹³³ On May 25, 2016, marking the 16-year anniversary of Israel's withdrawal from the south Lebanon security zone, the pro-Hezbollah *As-Safir* newspaper indicated that Hezbollah was indeed digging tunnels "that keep the settlers and soldiers of the enemy worried,"¹³⁴ but did not elaborate on whether these were confined to Lebanese territory or whether they crossed into Israel.

“Residents of northern Israeli towns have complained of hearing tunnel digging noises, prompting the IDF to comb the north for possible attack tunnels to no avail.”

In a future war, Hezbollah can also be expected to make a push into the Galilee and seize Israeli territory.¹³⁵ In August 2012, Hezbollah reportedly conducted its largest training exercise ever – supposedly encompassing 10,000 of its fighters – preparing Hezbollah's fighters “to occupy areas of the Upper Galilee.”¹³⁶ However, it is unrealistic to expect that Hezbollah would be able to hold this territory. Most likely, its aim will be to seize, even if for a few hours, a small town or a kibbutz on the

border, to score a psychological and propaganda victory. The IDF has therefore been training to confront such a scenario.¹³⁷

Because Hezbollah also realizes that one of Israel's great advantages over the group lies in its ability to have total air superiority over Lebanon, Hezbollah could try to target the runways at Israel's air bases. While such an attack is unlikely to be successful, particularly because it would require extremely precise and sustained fire, unconfirmed reports have emerged that Israel is taking this threat seriously enough to consider purchasing a squadron of F-35B Short Take-Off and Vertical Landing (STOVL) aircraft to deal with the possibility.¹³⁸ Given the high cost of the F-35B, however, and the highly inaccurate nature of Hezbollah's weapons, it is likely that Israel would opt to use highways and other improvised airstrips for takeoff and landing instead.

Hezbollah has been working to upgrade its anti-air defense capabilities in the hope of threatening the IAF's complete operational freedom over Lebanese airspace. It is suspected that Hezbollah already possesses a number of Russian-made anti-air missiles, including the man-portable SA-18,¹³⁹ and reportedly has acquired the more advanced SA-17 and SA-22.¹⁴⁰ Moreover,

137. Boaz Golan, “פרסום ראשון: כוחותינו ערכו תרגיל המדמה כיבוש” (First Report: Our Forces Carried Out an Exercise Simulating Occupation of Town by Hezbollah), *0404 News* (Israel), July 08, 2015. (<http://www.0404.co.il/post/Article1436258458.html>)

138. Amir Bohbot, “ישראל שוקלת לרכוש טייסת שלמה של מטוס” (Israel Weighs Purchasing a Full Squadron of the World's Most Advanced Stealth Jet), *Walla! News* (Israel), December 13, 2015. (<http://news.walla.co.il/item/2914547>)

139. Yiftah Shapir, “Syrian Weapons in Hizbollah Hands,” *The Institute for National Security Studies* (Israel), February 14, 2013. (<http://www.inss.org.il/index.aspx?id=4538&articleid=2609>)

140. “Hezbollah has Russian-made SA-17 missiles,” *The Times of Israel* (Israel), April 7, 2016. (http://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/hezbollah-has-russian-made-sa-17-missiles/); Amos Harel, “At UN, Netanyahu Reveals Details on Hezbollah Weapons Acquisitions,” *Haaretz* (Israel), October 2, 2015. (<http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.678540>)

132. Jack Khoury, “Hezbollah Touts Rockets, Tunnels on Border With Israel,” *Haaretz* (Israel), May 23, 2015. (<http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.657790>)

133. Adiv Sterman, “IDF combs north for possible attack tunnels,” *The Times of Israel* (Israel), January 28, 2015. (<http://www.timesofisrael.com/idf-combs-north-for-possible-attack-tunnels/>)

134. التحرير 2016: ردع الإسرائيليين.. وملاحقة التكفيريين” (Liberation 2016: Detering the Israeli...and Pursuing the Takfiri), *Assafir* (Lebanon), May 25, 2016. (<http://assafir.com/Article/8/496066>)

135. Ron Ben-Yishai, “Hezbollah's strategy: Rockets on Tel Aviv, raids on Galilee,” *Ynet* (Israel), February 2, 2013. (<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4343662,00.html>)

136. Ali al-Husseini, “نصر الله يُشرف على أضخم مناورة لـ‘حزب’” (Nasrallah Oversees ‘Hezbollah's’ Largest Maneuver), *Al Joumhouria* (Lebanon), August 23, 2012. (<http://www.aljournhouria.com/news/index/25769>)

Israeli reconnaissance flights have reportedly provided indications that Hezbollah could now have advanced radar to help anti-aircraft systems lock onto Israeli planes.¹⁴¹ As in past wars, Israel's jets are equipped with countermeasures to neutralize this threat and frequently fly against the same systems positioned in Syria. What Hezbollah is likely aiming for is to threaten Israeli helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles flying at a lower altitude. For example, Hezbollah might look to target helicopters dropping troops further north in the Beqaa.

“By all accounts, the next war with Hezbollah promises to be more challenging than any previous confrontation.”

Israel is preparing for large numbers of rockets, not to mention heavy casualties and damage, and is talking in terms of thousands of civilian deaths.¹⁴² The Israelis are training for the evacuation of whole communities from Israel's northern Galilee region,¹⁴³ while working assiduously to shore up its defenses along the Blue Line.¹⁴⁴ By all accounts, the next war with Hezbollah promises to be more challenging than any previous confrontation.

141. Amir Bohbot, “חיבואללה מוכן לשלב הבא: מאיים להפיל מטוסי קרב ישראליים בלבנון (Hezbollah is Ready for the Next Phase: Threatens to Down Israeli Warplanes in Lebanon),” *Walla! News* (Israel), February 14, 2016. (<http://news.walla.co.il/item/2934696>)

142. Or Heller, “The Next War will not be a Brief Event,” *Israel Defense*, May 4, 2015. (<http://www.israeldefense.co.il/en/content/%E2%80%9Cnext-war-will-not-be-brief-event%E2%80%9D>); “Israel: Any war with Hezbollah will be devastating,” *Al Jazeera* (Qatar), April 20, 2016. (<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/04/israel-war-hezbollah-devastating-160420183832190.html>)

143. Guy Varon, “תרגיל: ישובים שלמים בצפון יפוננו (Exercise: Whole Towns in the North Will be Evacuated),” *Channel 2 News* (Israel), June 6, 2016. (http://www.mako.co.il/news-military/security-q2_2016/Article-d40d29c19013551004.htm)

144. Judah Ari Gross, “IDF working 24/7 to shore up ‘insufficient’ defenses on Lebanese border,” *The Times of Israel*, June 8, 2016. (<http://www.timesofisrael.com/idf-working-247-to-shore-up-insufficient-defenses-on-lebanese-border/>)

Israel's Military is Still the Most Capable in the Region

As much havoc as Hezbollah could cause in Israel, the superiority of the IDF and Israel's capability to deliver punishing blows to Hezbollah – and therefore Lebanon – cannot be overstated.

In 2006, although the army failed to perform to Israel's standards, the air force delivered thundering aerial strikes on Hezbollah. The Shiite organization lost somewhere between 500-700 of its fighters and the majority of its mid- and long-range rockets.¹⁴⁵ The war also caused approximately \$2.5 billion in damage to Lebanon's civilian infrastructure.¹⁴⁶

In the decade since the Second Lebanon War, the Israelis have improved their ground capabilities. For one, Israel has increased production of its Namer armored personnel carriers (APCs), which sport the durable chassis of the IDF's Merkava tank, replacing the more vulnerable Vietnam War-era M-113 APCs. These newer generation APCs performed well during

145. Con Coughlin, “Teheran fund pays war compensation to Hizbollah families,” *The Telegraph* (UK), August 4, 2006. (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/1525593/Teheran-fund-pays-war-compensation-to-Hizbollah-families.html>); “Lebanon: Hezbollah's Political Regrouping Efforts,” *Stratfor*, August 29, 2006. (<https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/lebanon-hezbollahs-political-regrouping-efforts>); Uzi Mahnaimi, “Humbling of the supertroops shatters Israeli army morale,” *The Sunday Times* (UK), August 27, 2006. (<https://web.archive.org/web/20070304030521/http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/article620874.ece>); Benjamin Lambeth, *Air Operations in Israel's War Against Hezbollah: Learning from Lebanon and Getting it Right in Gaza*, (Rand Corporation, 2011), pages 29-30.

146. Jeffrey Stinson, “Lebanese infrastructure damage tops \$2.5B,” *USA Today*, August 7, 2006. (http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/2006-08-07-lebanon-damage_x.htm); Nicolas Photiades, “Lebanon,” *Blominvest Bank* (Lebanon), August 10, 2006. (http://www.rebuildlebanon.gov.lb/images/Browse/00000621_Warimpactreport10806.pdf)

the Hamas conflict of 2014, resisting bomb blasts and saving lives, though few were in service at the time.¹⁴⁷

Israel has also developed the Trophy (*Meil Ruach*) active protection system, which it has fit on Namer APCs and Merkava Mk 4 tanks. This system intercepts and destroys incoming missiles and rockets with a shotgun-like blast. It is meant to counter the threat of multiple RPGs being fired at a vehicle – a tactic called “swarming,” which Hezbollah has used to penetrate Israeli armor in the past – and the threat from anti-tank guided weapons like the Kornet.¹⁴⁸

Israel has also been developing guided rockets for their existing Multiple Rocket Launch Systems (MLRS), such as the GPS-guided Romach which is highly accurate up to 35 kilometers. In addition, they have expanded their development of the Tammuz guided missile, a GPS-guided artillery shell known as the Silver Bullet, and a GPS-guided mortar called the Hornet.¹⁴⁹ These systems provide IDF ground forces with the ability to accurately and more rapidly respond to Hezbollah fighters firing Katyushas, rather than relying on IAF strikes alone.

Israel has also expanded its surveillance and UAV capabilities with the inclusion of the Hermes 900 and the IAI Eitan, which have upgraded sensors, longer flight times, and new weapons systems.¹⁵⁰ This adds to the IDF’s ability to conduct persistent surveillance of south Lebanon and other Hezbollah areas of operation. The IDF has improved its ability to quickly respond to Hezbollah by linking various airborne and ground platforms into a single network to relay real-time intelligence and command and control.¹⁵¹

Israel also continues to expand its Hezbollah target-bank. However, these targets pose real challenges to the IDF. They are either adjacent to civilian infrastructure or contained within it. Indeed, Israeli sources convey that Hezbollah has established military infrastructure in homes, schools, apartment buildings, and even hospitals across Lebanon.¹⁵² This has since been made public in the Western media.¹⁵³

Hezbollah’s strategy of imbedding military assets in civilian areas was initially believed to only be limited to southern Shiite villages loyal to the group, with the goal of limiting the IDF’s ability to respond for fear of

147. “IDF steps up production of next gen troop carriers,” *The Times of Israel*, November 4, 2014. (<http://www.timesofisrael.com/idf-steps-up-production-of-next-gen-troop-carriers/>)

148. Robin Hughes, “Israel armour protection system ‘revolutionary,’” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, March 11, 2005. (http://www.rafael.co.il/marketing/SIP_STORAGE/FILES/7/607.pdf); Efrat Weiss, “IDF successfully tests new tank defense system,” *Ynet* (Israel), August 7, 2009. (<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3758478,00.html>)

149. Yaakov Lappin, “Analysis: IDF breaks 33-year silence on M48 Tamuz missile launcher,” *IHS Jane’s 360*, August 7, 2015. (<http://www.janes.com/article/53506/analysis-idf-breaks-33-year-silence-on-m48-tamuz-missile-launcher>); David Donald, “Precision attack with Silver Bullet (ES14E3),” *IHS Jane’s 360*, June 18, 2014. (<http://www.janes.com/article/39537/precision-attack-with-silver-bullet-es14e3>); “IMI Developed a Smart Mobile Mortar System,” *Israel Defense*, December 11, 2011. (<http://www.israeldefense.co.il/en/content/imi-developed-smart-mobile-mortar-system>)

150. “Hermes 900,” *Military Edge*, accessed on July 11, 2016. (<http://militaryedge.org/armaments/hermes-900/>); “Heron TP (Eitan),” *Military Edge*, accessed on July 11, 2016. (<http://militaryedge.org/armaments/heron-tp-eitan/>)

151. Barbara Opall-Rome, “Israel Debates New Ground Warfare Concepts,” *Defense News*, May 14, 2015. (<http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/land/army/2015/05/13/israel-ground-forces-maneuvering-armor-vehicles-precision-unmanned-robotics-tank/26968519/>); Arie Egozi, “Israeli air force showcases G550 surveillance fleet,” *Flight Global*, March 23, 2010. (<https://www.flightglobal.com/news/articles/israeli-air-force-showcases-g550-surveillance-fleet-339637/>); Yaakov Lappin, “IDF looking to roll out operation internet down to battalion level,” *IHS Jane’s 360*, February 18, 2016. (<http://www.janes.com/article/58149/idf-looking-to-roll-out-operational-internet-down-to-battalion-level>)

152. Senior Israeli official, July 2014.

153. Janine Zacharia, “Israel, long critical of Assad, may prefer he stay after all,” *The Washington Post*, March 30, 2011. (https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/israel-long-critical-of-assad-may-prefer-he-stay-after-all/2011/03/29/AFIq5JxB_story.html)

collateral damage.¹⁵⁴ The genesis of this approach could be first observed after the 2006 war, when Hezbollah embarked on a project to rebuild homes for needy Shiite families, with the caveat that at least one rocket launcher and several rockets would be housed there, and would be fired at Israel when the order was given. Hezbollah has also set up camouflaged defense positions in villages, containing Russian-, Iranian-, Chinese-, or even North Korean-made anti-tank missiles, while planting large explosive devices along access roads and converting large village structures into arms caches. In this manner, the organization converted some 180 Shiite villages and towns between the Zahrani River and the Blue Line into fighting zones – both above and below ground.¹⁵⁵

For years Israel has been warning Lebanon that the next war will be different from previous engagements. In 2012, Prime Minister Netanyahu said that Israel would hold the Lebanese state responsible if Hezbollah provoked a war, and that the IDF's military retaliation would not differentiate between Hezbollah and the Lebanese Republic.¹⁵⁶ Similarly, Maj. Gen. Yair Golan warned that a future war with Lebanon would be "much harsher," noting that the conflict "could create devastating damage to Lebanon," since Hezbollah embedding itself in civilian areas left "no other way to take out this threat..."¹⁵⁷

154. Ron Ben-Yishai, "Hezbollah moves into south Lebanon villages," *Ynet* (Israel), October 2, 2013. (<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4343397,00.html>)

155. Isabel Kershner, "Israel Says Hezbollah Positions Put Lebanese at Risk," *The New York Times*, May 12, 2015. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/13/world/middleeast/israel-says-hezbollah-positions-put-lebanese-at-risk.html>); Itamar Sharon, "Hezbollah shows off 'advanced tunnel network' on Israeli border," *The Times of Israel*, May 23, 2015. (<http://www.timesofisrael.com/hezbollah-flaunts-advanced-tunnel-network-on-israeli-border/>)

156. Barak Ravid, "Netanyahu: Israel Will Strike Lebanese State in Case of Hezbollah Provocation," *Haaretz* (Israel), August 27, 2012. (<http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/netanyahu-israel-will-strike-lebanese-state-in-case-of-hezbollah-provocation-1.460853>)

157. "Israeli general warns of 'devastating war' with Hezbollah," *Associated Press*, April 20, 2016. (<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/1eb9a69a87aa4300a3a4f93a49f5b9fa/israeli-general-warns-devastating-war-hezbollah>)

The War to End All Wars or More of the Same?

With Hezbollah positions deeply entrenched in civilian areas, Israel will have a stronger justification to strike them. But this does not mean that Israel will destroy these targets without regard for collateral damage. The IDF leadership fully understands that Hezbollah will look to exploit images of Lebanese civilian casualties in order to move the United States and Europe to pressure Israel into a premature ceasefire. This is exactly what Hezbollah did in 1996¹⁵⁸ and again in 2006.¹⁵⁹ It is also not hard to envision Iran threatening to pull out of the JCPOA for the same purpose.

In the end, Hezbollah's strategy is predicated on disrupting Israeli escalation in order to reach a ceasefire as quickly as possible. Indeed, a war that does not end decisively in Israel's favor – one in which Hezbollah survives to fight another day while scoring propaganda victories at home – will be claimed as a victory by Hezbollah and its patrons.

This, coupled with the other factors noted above, has convinced Israeli war planners of the need for the next round to not only be different, but to be decisive. Gabi Ashkenazi, the former IDF chief of staff who overhauled the army after the Second Lebanon War, said that in the next war it will be forbidden to ask who won.¹⁶⁰

The IDF's new Gideon Doctrine envisions a strategic departure from past conflicts: The IDF will immediately

158. Daniel Byman, *A High Price: The Triumphs & Failures of Israeli Counterterrorism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), page 236.

159. "Israel/Lebanon: Qana Death Toll at 28," *Human Rights Watch*, August 2, 2006. (<http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2006/08/02/lebano13899.htm>)

160. Alon Ben-David, "Israel's next war with Hezbollah will be swifter and decisive," *The Jerusalem Post* (Israel), June 3, 2016. (<http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Analysis-Israels-next-war-with-Hezbollah-will-be-swift-and-decisive-447114>)

deploy overwhelming force in a combined arms operation.¹⁶¹ The ground maneuver will be immediate, and will figure prominently. Ground, air, and naval capabilities will be integrated and will operate simultaneously, bringing to bear the full force of Israel's military superiority. Israeli military sources speak of plans to bring the war to a quick, decisive end. However, it might be necessary to extend the duration of the conflict in order to deal a sufficient blow to Hezbollah.

The problem, former Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Arens notes, is that "Hezbollah will come to the next confrontation with Israel far better prepared and more capable of bringing destruction to Israel's cities."¹⁶² Thus, the longer the war lasts, the more destruction Israel will sustain.

“A war that does not end decisively in Israel's favor – one in which Hezbollah survives to fight another day while scoring propaganda victories at home – will be claimed as a victory by Hezbollah and its patrons.”

But absorbing those blows may be necessary from the Israeli perspective. The Israelis are keenly aware that in the next conflict, Hezbollah could be protected by the aforementioned Iranian “nuclear umbrella.” The JCPOA has placed Iran on a patient pathway to a nuclear weapon.¹⁶³ The clock is ticking. Israel's window of opportunity to defeat Hezbollah in the shadow of the nuclear deal cannot be ignored.

161. Gabi Siboni, “The IDF Strategy: A Focused Action Approach,” *The Institute for National Security Studies* (Israel), August 27, 2015. (<http://www.inss.org.il/index.aspx?id=4538&articleid=10446>)

162. Moshe Arens, “Was the Second Lebanon War a success of failure?” *Moshe Arens*, June 20, 2016. (<http://moshearens.com/2016/06/20/was-the-second-lebanon-war-a-success-or-failure/>)

163. Mark Dubowitz, “How to Get a Better Deal with Iran,” *Foreign Policy*, August 17, 2015. (<http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/17/how-to-get-a-better-deal-with-iran-congress-reject-nuclear-treaty/>)

Policy Recommendations

There are actions that the United States can undertake not only to delay the outbreak of war, but to weaken Hezbollah so that when war does erupt, we can ensure an outcome favorable to U.S. interests in the region. The enforcement of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701, which called for disarming “all groups in Lebanon,” would have been the best option available.¹⁶⁴ However, the United Nations has failed to enforce its own recommendations. Other U.S. policies must therefore be considered:

1. The United States must reconsider its failed policy in Syria. The current policy has not only allowed Iran and Hezbollah to expand their regional aggression, but has publicly legitimized Iran's position in Syria and enabled Iran to maintain its land bridge with Hezbollah. It has also allowed for Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran to turn the Golan Heights into a forward military base. These developments not only directly endanger Israel, but also other U.S. allies in the Middle East. The war in Syria is a war for the regional order and balance of power, pitting Iran and its allies on one side, and America's traditional Sunni allies on the other. The objective of U.S. policy in Syria should be the defeat of the Iranian camp. Unfortunately, under the Obama administration, the policy has been to empower it.
2. The United States should make it clear through diplomatic and defense channels that Iran's continued arming of Hezbollah will have painful consequences. Tehran has not been punished for providing advanced weapons systems to Hezbollah, for example. While targeted sanctions against Hezbollah are important, targeting the

164. United Nations Security Council, Press Release, “Security Council Calls for End to Hostilities Between Hizbollah, Israel, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 1701(2006),” August 11, 2006. (<http://www.un.org/press/en/2006/sc8808.doc.htm>)

source of those funds – Iran – is far more crucial. Iran has threatened to walk away from the nuclear deal if certain non-nuclear sanctions are enforced. The White House cannot bow to this pressure.

3. The United States should take additional steps, beyond those already taken, to target Hezbollah finance on a global scale. Our existing sanctions architecture is already beginning to impact Hezbollah, particularly as Lebanese banks agree to take measures at home. In addition to those efforts, a more united front with our GCC partners might help to disabuse our European allies of the notion that a distinction exists between a political and military wing within Hezbollah. After all, not even Hezbollah itself makes this distinction.
4. The United States should be aware of Israel's military needs well in advance of a war with Hezbollah. This might include increased funds for additional interceptors for missile defense systems like Iron Dome and David's Sling, as well as tunnel detection and destruction technology. Israel will almost certainly need to replenish the pre-positioned U.S. military stocks based in country, too. The defense of energy infrastructure, both on the ground and at sea, will also be a major concern.
5. The United States, which in recent years has upgraded the capabilities of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) even as it colluded with Hezbollah, should warn the LAF not to lend any assistance to Hezbollah in a future war. Israel expects the LAF to assist Hezbollah in the next conflict, in which case it could very well be treated as a legitimate military target.¹⁶⁵ Washington should leverage its

assistance to the Lebanese government and the LAF to break its perceived symbiotic relationship with Hezbollah. Continued support must be predicated upon a complete LAF divorce from Hezbollah.

6. Should war break out, the United State should actively delay the imposition of a premature ceasefire in order to buy the Israelis as much time as needed to complete their military campaign. Washington must not be influenced by criticisms of "disproportionate force" or calls for "restraint" or "de-escalation" so often employed in the past. Close coordination with the GCC, which will be eager to hasten Hezbollah's defeat, will be important in this regard.
7. Congress should request a report by the U.S. military on Hezbollah's massive underground tunnel network to clarify the legality of targeting them. The report should explain the extent to which Hezbollah's tunnel strategy includes the use of civilians, and how it is a flagrant violation of existing UN resolutions.
8. The United States must take steps to ensure that Russia does not interfere in the next conflict and to prevent an outcome of the conflict that would empower the Kremlin beyond the heavy influence it already wields in this corner of the region. This will require a change in America's posture toward Russia, specifically in Syria, but perhaps elsewhere, including Ukraine.

The above measures will certainly not stop the war from happening. But if implemented, they can strengthen American interests in the Middle East both before and during a conflict that Washington has worked for a decade to avoid.

165. Stephen Hughes, "Israel, Iran and the evolving asymmetrical & conventional missile warfare part two of four," *The Jerusalem Post* (Israel), January 7, 2015. (<http://www.jpost.com/Blogs/The-Iran-Threat/Israel-Iran-and-the-evolving-asymmetrical-and-conventional-missile-warfare-part-two-of-four-386910>)

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